NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE *MAYAGUEZ* INCIDENT:
AN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY ANALYSIS**

by

Edward J. Lengel
Charles R. Rambo
Shelley A. Rodriguez
Michael D. Tyynismaa

September 2006

Thesis Advisor: Erik Jansen
Second Reader: Brian H. Greenshields

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			*Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188*
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington DC 20503.			
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (*Leave blank*)	**2. REPORT DATE** September 2006	**3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED** Master's Thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE: The *Mayaguez* Incident: An Organizational Theory Analysis			**5. FUNDING NUMBERS**
6. AUTHORS Edward J. Lengel, Shelley A. Rodriguez, Michael D. Tyynismaa and Charles R. Rambo			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			**8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER**
9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			**10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER**
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.			
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited			**12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE** A
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) Applying selected concepts of organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident of 1975 leads to a more comprehensive understanding of events and more accurate lessons learned. Application of organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident demonstrates the decision processes at the executive level left the military operation vulnerable to failure. Henry Mintzberg's structural contingency model and Lee Bowman and Terrence Deal's frames model are used and are applied to executive-level decisions. The rationale behind focusing on the executive level is twofold: first, it is where final critical decisions are made and second, military operations cannot take place without an executive-level authorization. The *Mayaguez* crisis was rife with potential pitfalls and, though President Ford was equipped with an organization of intelligent, competent personnel, the result was unnecessary loss of life. Publicly, the operation was a success and President Ford the savior of the *Mayaguez* crew. To the military, the operation was an embarrassment because of failures in the organizational structure and decision making. Application of organizational theory provides an avenue for analysis of the military operation within the *Mayaguez* rescue.			
14. SUBJECT TERMS *Mayaguez*, Organizational Theory, President Ford, decision making, executive level, frames, Mintzberg, Structure in Five, coordination mechanisms, organizational design, divisionalized form			**15. NUMBER OF PAGES** 197
			16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	**18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE** Unclassified	**19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT** Unclassified	**20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT** UL

i

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

THE *MAYAGUEZ* INCIDENT: AN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY ANALYSIS

Edward J. Lengel, Major, United States Air Force
B.S., United States Air Force Academy, 1992

Charles R. Rambo, Major, United States Army
B.S., East Tennessee State, 1994

Shelley A. Rodriguez, Major, United States Air Force
B.S., United States Air Force Academy, 1992
M.B.A., Touro University, 2000

Michael D. Tyynismaa, Major, United States Air Force
B.S., North Carolina State University, 1991
M.A. George Washington University, 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL
September 2006**

Author: Edward J. Lengel   Charles R. Rambo

         Shelley A. Rodriguez   Michael D. Tyynismaa

Approved by: Erik Jansen
              Thesis Advisor

              Col. Brian H. Greenshields
              Second Reader/Co-Advisor

              Gordon McCormick
              Chairman, Department of Defense Analysis

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ABSTRACT

Applying selected concepts of organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident of 1975 leads to a more comprehensive understanding of events and more accurate lessons learned. Application of organizational theory demonstrates the decision processes at the executive level left the military operation vulnerable to failure. Henry Mintzberg's structural contingency model and Lee Bowman and Terrence Deal's frames model within organizational theory are used and are applied to executive-level decisions. The rationale behind focusing on the executive level is twofold: First, it is where final critical decisions were made, and second, military operations cannot take place without an executive-level authorization. The *Mayaguez* crisis was rife with potential pitfalls and, though President Ford was equipped with an excellent organization of intelligent, competent personnel, the result was unnecessary loss of life. Publicly, the operation was a success and President Ford the savior of the *Mayaguez* crew. To the military, the operation was an embarrassment—all because of failures within the organizational structure and poor decision making. Application of organizational theory provides an avenue for analysis of the military operation within the *Mayaguez* rescue.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF FIGURES

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF TABLES

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

I.   INTRODUCTION

On 12 May 1975, an American merchant ship, SS *Mayaguez*, was seized by the Cambodian government in what President Gerald Ford believed was a threatening show of force by the relatively new Khmer Rouge government. The United States government responded swiftly by sending a full military package to rescue the Mayaguez and her crew. In the end, President Ford publicly declared the operation a success, but for the military, it was an abysmal failure. A full report was produced to summarize the events. After reviewing the report, Congress requested, and the Government Accounting Office (GAO) conducted, an investigation to clarify incongruous statements and events listed in the incident report.

This thesis is based on the hypothesis that by applying selected concepts of organizational theory to the Mayaguez incident of 1975, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of events and more accurate lessons learned. Specifically, application of organizational theory to the Mayaguez incident demonstrates that the decision processes at the executive level left the military operation vulnerable to failure. To conduct this analysis, the authors used Henry Mintzberg's structural contingency model and Lee Bowman and Terrence Deal's frames of reference model within organizational theory. In particular, the models are applied to the highest levels of the National Command Authority and Department of Defense organizations, focusing on the executive-level decisions rather than the entire structure itself. This thesis defines the executive level during the Mayaguez incident as the National Security Council principal members: president, secretary of state, and secretary of defense. The rationale behind focusing on the executive level is twofold: First, it is where final critical decisions were (and still are) made, and second, military operations did not and cannot take place without an executive-level decision.

A.   PURPOSE:

The purpose of this thesis is to reexamine the events and published lessons learned of 12–15 May 1975 through the lenses of organizational theory. Because there is

no single, cohesive organizational theory per se, the task of examining organizations becomes complicated, requiring integration of a web of different theories and approaches. However, by combining select theories within a larger frame of reference model, a clearer picture of the organization, actors, and its effectiveness is obtained. Applying organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident demonstrates that decision processes at the executive level made the military operation vulnerable to failure.

Although the Government Accounting Office (GAO) published a full report of the Mayaguez incident, it was both incomplete and inaccurate in terms of analysis. The report merely consolidated information from various sources within the government, to include the military, rather than applying analysis to the events themselves. Unfortunately for the military, the GAO report was, and still is, the only source of information for lessons learned. Since inaccurate or incomplete, the lessons derived from the information presented left the military vulnerable to committing the same mistakes in future operations. If an analysis of the errors made in the planning and execution of the Mayaguez incident resulted in a more comprehensive review of the organization as well as its actions, perhaps subsequent missions such as the hostage rescue attempt in Iran— Operation EAGLE CLAW, or more commonly, Desert One—would not have failed. While the GAO report reviews events that were not executed as planned, it fails to *analyze or explain* shortcomings within the organization itself that also attributed or were causal to the mistakes made. The report seems to only assign blame to individuals rather than examine failed processes, structures, and systems; it actually misses the analytical process altogether. In fact, nothing was stated about the failures of the organization except in the case of failed communications. In the absence of analysis, the recommendations for correcting the problems are then flawed.

For an organization to operate efficiently and effectively, careful attention must be paid to every aspect of the organization, its environment, and the mission it intends to accomplish. Several methods could be used to analyze the Mayaguez incident, but perhaps the most telling is that of organizational theory. In this thesis, the focus is on the executive level. Applying organizational theory to the executive decision makers

involved in the *Mayaguez* incident reveals that the decision processes of the individuals—specifically President Ford—were flawed, causing the entire military operation to fail.

B.   BACKGROUND

The following chapter is an adaptation from Dr. John Guilmartin's book, *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang.* Although other sources were consulted and are available on the subject, Dr. Guilmartin's book appeared to be the most succinct and accurate account of the events that transpired. He is recognized as the foremost authority on the *Mayaguez* incident not only because he researched and authored his book, but also because he piloted one of the helicopters during the operation, thus enabling firsthand accounts of the action.

On 12 May 1975, two weeks after the fall of Saigon, Cambodia's Navy seized the U.S.-owned container ship SS *Mayaguez*, along with its crew. The intentions of the Cambodian government were unknown when the ship was seized, largely because leadership in Washington, D.C., did not recognize and would not communicate with the new Cambodian government, comprised of the Khmer Rouge. President Gerald Ford quickly came under intense pressure to recover the crew and ship. In 1968, North Korea seized the *USS Pueblo*, resulting in eleven months of captivity of the crew and embarrassment to the United States. With this event in mind, President Ford acted decisively to recover the *Mayaguez* and crew. What should have been an easy operation against a small, unorganized and officially unrecognized country was anything but.

The United States, having recalled forces after the Vietnam conflict, still had sufficient airpower based at U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Base, Thailand, to launch an operation, but needed a ground force to aid in the recovery of the *Mayaguez* crew. Unfortunately, ground troops were stationed elsewhere; some of them still exiting Vietnam, some in Thailand, and some in Okinawa, Japan. The president requested troops to meet the strict timeline he imposed for recovery of the *Mayaguez* and crew, going as far as to return troops who had just left the battlefields of Vietnam. Late that night, on the evening of May 12, 1975, the *Mayaguez* was located, anchored off of Koh Tang

Island in the Gulf of Siam. Based on the assumption the crew was on the island, the command structure planned the operation as a rescue of the *Mayaguez* crew and recapture of the ship as United States' sovereign property. The Marines would deploy to U-Tapao and board Air Force special-operations and rescue CH/HH-53s based in Thailand to take the beach at Koh Tang Island on May 15, 1975. The military also was tasked to recapture the actual ship, SS *Mayaguez*. This would be the Air Force's first helicopter assault operation.[1] After recovery of the crew, the helicopters would transport the crew to the aviation-ready frigate USS Henry Holt, already in seas nearby.

Unbeknownst to the Marine forces and Air Force crews, the island harbored an estimated 100–300 armed, combat-hardened Khmer Rouge forces placed there to protect Koh Tang from occupation by Vietnam. An old political dispute over sovereign rights to Koh Tang Island had escalated between Cambodia and Vietnam in recent months, causing the Cambodians to station combat-ready troops and weaponry on the island. Because diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam were strained and diplomacy with the Cambodians was virtually non-existent, the United States government failed to accurately assess the island's inhabitants and importance to the region. Instead, the intelligence community estimated a total of only 18 to 40 persons on Koh Tang Island, including both the lightly armed militia and indigenous population. This would be only one of many major mistakes made in the *Mayaguez* incident.

On the approach to the island, the Air Force helicopter crews were the first to suffer the consequences of previous intelligence and diplomatic failures as the Khmer Rouge shot down three of the first four helicopters approaching the island. Intelligence was both inadequate and unavailable for the mission and diplomatic efforts, notably limited in nature, had failed to secure the release of the *Mayaguez* and crew. Unfortunately for the operation, the second helicopter carried the Marine Forward Air Controller (FAC) team, and the fourth helicopter was so badly damaged it had to abort and return to U-Tapao. Eventually, Marines were inserted successfully via other helicopters. Regrettably, the Air Force A-7s failed to locate the Marines, leaving them

_____

[1] The previous assaults done with Special Operations Forces, e.g. Son Tay, were still classified at the time of the Mayaguez Operation.

without fire support. The Marines continued to fight valiantly as they waited for the remaining helicopters to fly through enemy fire to deliver reinforcements, their motivation waning from the offensive beach assault to mere survival. Unfortunately, the enemy continued to fire on and destroy most of the remaining helicopters leaving the Marines with few options to return. In fact, only three of the helicopters that landed in U-Tapao would be able to continue and return to Koh Tang to recover the ground forces.

Finally, with the assault still waging, a Marine boarding party brought in by Air Force helicopters embarked the *Mayaguez* expecting to find the ship under siege. To the contrary, the ship was deserted because the Khmer Rouge had taken the *Mayaguez* crew to the Cambodian mainland two days earlier. President Ford ordered air strikes on the Cambodian port and vessels in the surrounding waters to protect the military forces and preclude the SS *Mayaguez* from being taken to the mainland. Unbeknownst to the military forces involved in the operations, the Khmer Rouge were constantly moving the crew during the operation not as a practice of deception but merely to get the crew to a location suitable for release.

The reason behind moving the *Mayaguez* crew is unclear. It is possible the Khmer Rouge did not want to complicate the dispute with Vietnam over the island by involving the United States, or it may be that the U.S.' retaliatory strikes on the Cambodian mainland influenced the Khmer Rouge. Regardless of the reason, the Khmer Rouge released the crew, sending them out to sea in a Thai fishing boat. Fortunately, the USS Henry G. Wilson had just arrived in the area and was able to recover the *Mayaguez* crew after spotting Caucasians waving white flags on the deck of a Thai fishing vessel.[2] The recovery of the *Mayaguez* crew resulted in a Presidential order to cease assault operations on Koh Tang Island, saving a second wave of Marines from possible fatalities as the Khmer Rouge were far more prepared than our fighting forces.

After the *Mayaguez* crew was recovered, the assault operation was transformed into a rescue operation to extract the remaining Marines off the island. An AC-130 Spectre Gunship provided firepower while an air-rescue HH-53 Jolly Green and two OV-

---

[2] Commander in Chief Pacific Command. *The SS Mayaguez Incident.* Command History Branch, Office of the Joint Secretary, Appendix VI. San Francisco, CA. 1976.

10 Forward Air Controllers (FACs) coordinated in the air to save the remaining Marines. It was the FACs, and not the chain of command, that initiated the rescue of the battered Marines. When the rescue operations began, night already had fallen, but the Khmer Rouge had not relented with its assault against U.S. forces. Despite only four HH-53s being flight capable, the rescue force launched to recover the Marines. Of course, within seconds of approach to the island, all HH-53s were fired upon, rendering one of them unable to complete the mission. As the night progressed, one more helicopter was able to return to the rescue operation, achieving only marginal success.

At the end of the night, as the last helicopter approached, the ground commander was asked to take a final head count of his Marines to ensure it would be the helicopter's last run and no one would be left behind. The commander concluded all Marines were accounted for and the helicopter extracted the Marines to the USS Holt. Once aboard the Holt, a final headcount was taken and the mood drastically soured with the news: E Company was missing three Marines. Those Marines were declared as Killed in Action (KIA) by the United States government who stands by its declaration even today. However, recently uncovered eye-witness accounts and interviews of the soldiers on the beach revealed the Marines were, in fact, left behind fighting for their lives.[3]

In the GAO report of the *Mayaguez* incident as well as President Ford's assessment, the mission was considered a success despite the contrary opinion of those involved in the operation below the executive level. Military losses went largely unnoticed with the announcement of the successful recovery of the SS *Mayaguez* and her crew by President Ford. Forty-one military men lost their lives attempting to save the *SS Mayaguez* and her 39 crewmembers. Unknown to the president and cabinet, and before the first shot was fired on Koh Tang Island, the *Mayaguez* crew had been released to a Thai fishing vessel. The entire beach assault was executed needlessly. Row Rowan, in *The Four Days of Mayaguez*, writes:

> At 7:29 A.M., the very minute United States Marines were seizing his ship, and Gerald Ford was being informed by Henry Kissinger of Phnom Penh's intent to release it anyway, the captain and crew of the *Mayaguez*

3 United States Department of Defense News Release. "MIA Marines Identified from the Mayaguez Incident." http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2000/b05182000_bt260-00.html.

were setting out in a fishing boat from the Cambodian shore—a fact which would have amazed the president, the secretary of state, and all the Marines fighting and dying on Koh Tang.[4]

By applying select concepts of organizational theory, this thesis concludes the GAO report was incomplete in analysis and consequently formed the basis for learning the wrong lessons. Unfortunately even today, lessons learned are often generated but rarely studied or analyzed before or after issuance. Faulty information and lack of analysis provide for erroneous results and can lead to future failures. Organizational theory provides a new perspective to the *Mayaguez* incident, producing drastically different results and conclusions than previously published material. In fact, it is possible that had President Ford understood or applied some aspect of organizational theory in his analysis, he might have prevented the failures experienced by the military and ultimately, saved the lives of the men who fought on Koh Tang.

C.   METHODOLOGY AND CHAPTER REVIEW

This thesis is derived from a project assigned by Dr. Erik Jansen to analyze an organization using the principles taught in his graduate classes at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Dr. John Guilmartin's book, *A Very Short War*, served as the impetus for the detailed research of the organizations involved in the *Mayaguez* incident and because of recently declassified National Security Council (NSC) minutes, the project quickly honed in on decision making at the executive level. Subsequently, the discoveries concluded in the assignment gained the interest of Dr. Guilmartin. At his request, the findings were presented at the Mershon Center at Ohio State University. From there, this thesis evolved.

In addition to Dr. Guilmartin's book, several others were accessed in researching the incident. Ralph Wetterhahn's *The Last Battle: The Mayaguez Incident and the End of the Vietnam War* provided a similar account of the incident but focused more on the failure to account for all Marines when exiting Koh Tang Island rather than the executive

---

[4] Rowen, Roy. *The Four Days of the Mayaguez.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

level of operational structure during the incident.[5] Another work by Roy Rowan, *The Four Days of the Mayaguez*, provides a historical account of the Mayaguez incident and though published in 1975 (the same year in which the incident took place), still offers an insightful account of some of the executive-level problems. Finally, Christopher Lamb's *Belief Systems and Decision Making in the Mayaguez Crisis* offered an expanse of researched aimed directly at the executive level of the *Mayaguez* incident. His approach, while also based on concepts within organizational theory, varies from the premise of this work. The supposition that President Ford either consciously or subconsciously altered the structure of the organization by essentially becoming the sole actor within the strategic apex is unique to this thesis. Again, this is largely due to the application of diverse concepts that fall under the umbrella of organizational theory.

Besides authored books, a diverse collection of government and military resources were accessed. The Marines publication on military command and control, memorandums issued during the incident, the GAO report, and NSC minutes were all researched in detail. The GAO report, when coupled with the recently declassified NSC minutes, revealed information not previously published in other accounts of the *Mayaguez* incident with the exception of one. Brian Kelly's documentary released in 2000, *Seized at Sea: Situation Critical (The Story of the Mayaguez Incident)*, cited some of the references in the NSC minutes, relating them directly to executive-level decisions. However, while the account is compelling, it only exposes the decisions and still does not address the reasons behind the failures at the executive level. Particularly valuable to this thesis, however, are Mr. Kelly's interviews of former President Ford, then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, and then Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger.

In addition to the interviews supplied by Mr. Kelly's documentary and Dr. Guilmartin himself, other participants were also consulted. Colonel (Ret.) Jim Davis, ground commander of the Marines during the incident; then First Lieutenant Bob Blough, a HH-53 pilot during the rescue, and Dr. Guilmartin all provided insight gained over the

---

[5] It should be noted Dr. Guilmartin found discrepancies in Mr. Wetterhahn's facts, leading Dr. Guilmartin to question Mr. Wetterhahn's account of the Marines left behind. In interviews conducted with Dr. Guilmartin during the trip to Ohio State University, November 12-14, 2006, he refuted some of the facts in Mr. Wetterhahn's book because of his personal involvement in the events cited.

years since the incident. Additionally, electronic mail was received from then Second Lieutenant Dan Hoffman, Marine ground troop who provided a first-hand account of the heavy ground fighting on Koh Tang as well as Larry Barnett, also part of the Marine assault force who provided yet another perspective of the ground account. While strongly opinionated, the interviews helped examine the frames through which participants viewed the event. Although the thesis ultimately focuses on the executive-level, specifically President Ford, the interviews were compelling accounts of how influential the concepts of frames of reference are in the body of organizational theory.

Because there is no single, unified organizational theory but rather a vast number of complementary, and sometimes competing, theories, much research was accomplished to determine those most applicable to the analysis of the *Mayaguez* incident. It was determined the most relevant works in organizational theory for this particular analysis are Henry Mintzberg's structure in fives theory and Larry Bolman and Terrence Deal's work on frames. The structural theory easily dominated the research done on the organization because of particular importance to the thesis is the structure itself. Mintzberg's discussion of coordination mechanisms and communication within the organization helped to define areas of failure previously not addressed by the GAO reports. Bolman and Deal's work on frames was especially critical to understanding the failures caused by executive-level decision making. By combining the two concepts within organizational theory, the proposal that President Ford became the sole member of the strategic apex which resulted in a changed and ineffective organizational structure was developed. Simply applying organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident demonstrates the decision processes at the executive level left the military operation vulnerable to failure.

D.   CHAPTER REVIEW

In Chapter I, the basic story of the *Mayaguez* was revealed. In Chapter II, the thesis provides a review of organizational theory and discusses key concepts of configuration and frames. In Chapter III, Mintzberg's structural theory is applied to the executive level actors in the *Mayaguez* incident and in Chapter IV, application of

Bowman and Deal's frames theory further reveals problems in the executive-level decision making. In Chapter V, the findings are consolidated and the true value of the critical analysis of executive-level decisions is revealed. The thesis concludes with Chapter VI and provides implications and recommendations for future study. Finally, appendices of the NSC minutes, the GAO report, and other works serve to enhance the analysis achieved.

II.   ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

A.   INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

The goal of this chapter is to introduce key concepts and terms that are used in the analysis of the *Mayaguez* incident. The published lessons learned from this incident, while important, were produced with little or no analysis.[6] The major thrust of this chapter is derived from Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal's book, *Reframing Organizations* and from Henry Mintzberg, a noted authority among organizational theorists. Both approaches have synthesized a diverse body of organizational theory and while they are not the only approaches, they were most revealing in analyzing the *Mayaguez* incident.

Bolman and Deal's model of framing is used to define what frames represent, how they are derived, and their value in analysis. Secondly, frames can be used to better understand organizations and the decisions made by their leaders. Using the frames presented by Bolman and Deal, Mintzberg's models of organizational structure are interlaced to develop the critical analyses, especially within the structural frame.

B.   FRAMES

"As a mental map, a frame is a set of ideas or assumptions you carry in your head. It helps you understand and negotiate a particular territory. The territory isn't necessarily defined by geography."[7] People develop frames to conduct everyday life. Some are built subconsciously while others involve a deliberate process. Framing is a way to sort through large volumes of information expeditiously, enabling a decision maker to discern important information from merely peripheral details. It is a way to sort and classify information into distinct categories, thereby resulting in a frame. Because it is often a personal perspective when sorting the information, the frame sometimes implies values for judging a situation. Different people who observe the same situation may actually frame it differently based on their personal perspectives and prior experiences. The message is, "what looks reasonable, or ridiculous, depends on the context— on how it is

---

[6] See Appendix D

[7] Bolman, Larry G. and Terrence E. Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership.* 3rd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, 12.

framed [by] what has preceded it and the language used to present it."[8] Regardless of the perspective, the goal of framing is to organize information.

Bolman and Deal provide organizational frames of reference to assist in understanding organizations as open systems and make it easier to navigate among the complexity of the organization. To achieve this, they have categorized different disciplines into four frames: Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic.[9] Each of these frames emphasizes the perspective associated with a major discipline such as sociology, psychology, political science and anthropology. By categorizing the disciplines, multiple approaches to organizational theory can be packaged into frames that hold concepts more easily applied to organizations. In the case of the *Mayaguez*, frames would have provided multiple perspectives of the problem at hand for President Ford and his staff.

A key part of the application process with the four frames is the understanding that each frame has specific strengths and weaknesses associated with it. Just like any common mechanical tool, understanding which tool is needed and appreciating the capabilities of that tool is necessary. For example, one can use a hammer to drive in a screw, but a screwdriver would probably produce much better results, especially in the long term. In addition, Bolman and Deal's four frames are meant to be multiplicative in nature. "Effective managers need multiple tools, the skill to use each of them, and the wisdom to match frames to situations."[10] Balancing the tools should always be an objective for any manager dealing with a complex problem. President Ford's limited international experience as a naval officer likely produced a different frame through which he viewed the *Mayaguez* incident than that of his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, a man whose entire background involved foreign policy.

---

[8] Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1992, 190.

[9] Bolman and Deal, 14-15.

[10] Ibid., 18.

C.   STRUCTURAL FRAME

With its roots in "sociology and management science, the structural frame emphasizes goals, specialized roles, and formal relationships."[11]   Military members are keenly aware of this frame because members are trained to understand their formal organizational chart and their chain of command.   "The organizational structure determines where formal power and authority are located."[12]   Every individual is assigned a role and is required to understand their responsibilities and tasks. In addition every move a service member makes is governed by rules, regulations, policies and procedures.   To this end, "the best structure is the one that helps the organizations achieve its strategy" and utilize its resources efficiently.[13] This belief takes into account six assumptions that Bolman and Deal identify as forming the structural frame foundation:[14]

- Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
- Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specializations and a clear division of labor.
- Appropriate forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
- Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal preferences and extraneous pressures.
- Structures must be designed to fit an organization's circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment).
- Problems and performance gaps arise from structural deficiencies and can be remedied through analysis and restructuring.

Scanning through this list, it is apparent that the focus is on the needs of the organization and not the individual worker. In the military, although leadership works to mitigate risks, there is often a requirement to put the needs of the mission and the state above the individual member.

Bolman and Deal state that organizational structure is a blueprint for establishing formal roles and expectations; it defines internal and external interactions of the

---

[11] Bolman and Deal, 14.

[12] Galbraith, Jay R., Diane Downey and Amy Kates. *Designing Dynamic Organizations: A Hands on Guide for Leaders at All Levels.* New York: American Management Association, 2002, 3.

[13] Galbraith, Downey and Kates. 60.

[14] Bolman and Deal, 45.

organization and its members. In addition, this blueprint can be designed in numerous ways and should consider such forces as the environment, job specialization, coordination mechanisms and control measures. The factors that influence organizational architecture are better explained by Henry Mintzberg's extensive work in the area of structural configurations.[15] This work is based on Mintzberg's Structure in Fives and is used as the basis of analysis within the structural frame.

D.   MINTZBERG'S STRUCTURE IN FIVES

In Mintzberg's Structure of Fives, there are five types of organizations: Simple Structure, Machine Bureaucracy, Professional Bureaucracy, Divisionalized Form, and Adhocracy. All organizations consist of five components: the Strategic Apex, Middle Line, Technostructure, Support Staff, and Operating Core. For each part to communicate, organizations use some or all of the five coordination mechanisms to synchronize the differentiated components within the organization: Direct Supervision, Standardization of Work Processes, Standardization of Skills, Standardization of Outputs, and Mutual Adjustment. Mintzberg's five-sector diagram depicted below shows the major components of an organizational configuration and includes the Operating Core, Middle Line, Strategic Apex, Technostructure, and Support Staff.[16]

---

[15] Mintzberg, Henry. "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?" *Harvard Business Review*, January-February (1981): 1–16.

[16] Ibid., 3.
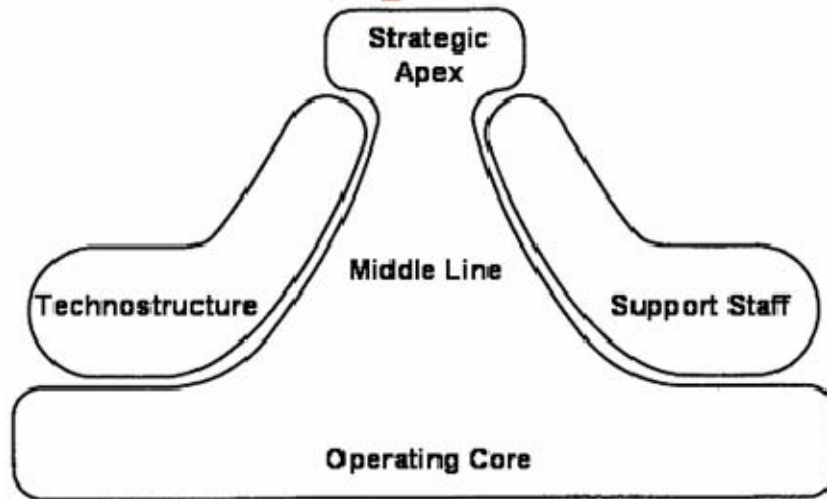
Figure 1.   Mintzberg's Structure in Fives

These five parts describe organizational structures and how the organization may cope with its "environment, workforce, technology, and past structural commitments."[17] It is necessary to define each of the five parts to understand how they fit into the organizational structure and how they interact with one another. How the components fit and interact can determine the type of structure, and the inverse is also true: the type of structure can determine how the components fit and interact. Table 1 shows the relationship between the type of organization, the dominant parts, and the dominate mechanisms according to Mintzberg in his "Organization: Fashion or Fit" article.[18]

---

[17] Bolman and Deal, 72.

[18] Mintzberg, Henry. "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?", 6

Table 1.   Structure, Coordinating Mechanism, and Dominant Part

Structure Type	Primary Coordinating Mechanism	Dominant Part
Simple structure	Direct supervision	Strategic apex
Machine bureaucracy	Standardization of work	Technostructure
Professional bureaucracy	Standardization of skills	Operating core
Divisionalized form	Standardization of outputs	Middle line
Adhocracy	Mutual adjustment	Support staff

First, the operating core consists of the main workforce, which consists of those hired to perform the "basic work of the organization".[19] In the *Mayaguez* incident, this would be the tactical elements tasked to execute the operation. Second, and above the operating core is the middle line, comprised of managers who supervise, control, and provide resources for the operators.[20] For the operation, the middle line consisted of units such as the Commander in Chief of Pacific Fleet and his Air Force counterpart commanders, essentially the military leadership of the DoD. The highest level of the structure is the senior management or the strategic apex; they are focused on the environment, the mission, and shaping the grand design of the organization.[21] In the *Mayaguez* operation, this consisted of the National Command Authority. The last two parts sit adjacent to the middle line and are the technostructure and support staff. For the *Mayaguez* incident, intelligence and logistical units filled these roles.   The technostructure consists of specialists and professionals who standardize, measure, and inspect processes.[22] Examples of the technostructure are accounting departments, quality control, and standardization functions. Finally, the support staff performs indirect services that facilitate the work getting accomplished by all others in the organization.

---

[19] Ibid., 3

[20] Bolman and Deal, 73.

[21] Mintzberg, "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?", 3.

[22] Ibid.

According to Mintzberg, the five types of organizations are dominated by a coordination mechanism. Martinez and Jarillo (1989) assessed research collected on coordination mechanisms used by multinational corporations. They define a coordination mechanism as, "any administrative tool for achieving integration among different units within an organization."[23] Mintzberg's coordination mechanisms within the organizational structure are: direct supervision, standardization of work processes, standardization of skills, standardization of outputs, and mutual adjustment.

Mintzberg describes the organizational environment in terms of stability and complexity. In a stable environment, change happens slowly. By contrast, an unstable or turbulent environment requires quick response from an organization to maintain its competitive edge. The environment of the organization can vary in complexity: the more complex, the more difficult it is for management to direct the organization leading to the need for decentralization.[24] Complexity describes the task that must be accomplished to generate the organization's product. (Producing a hamburger at McDonald's is a relatively simple task, where as a highly trained surgeon must execute complex tasks to perform an effective surgery.)

The way an organization communicates and operates relies on centralization or decentralization. Each method, particularly in decision making, affects the outcome of the structural design. Mintzberg describes vertical decentralization as "the extent to which decision making is delegated to managers down the middle line, while horizontal decentralization describes the extent to which non-managers . . . control decision processes."[25] The degree of vertical, horizontal, or any combination of the two types of decentralization will affect the coordination mechanism by which the structure is dominated by. Mintzberg's Fives is more easily understood by reviewing the following diagram:

---

[23] Martinez, J. Carlos, and Jon. C. Jarillo. "The evolution of research on coordinationmechanisms in multinational research." *Journal of International Business Studies*, 1989: 489–514, 490.

[24] Mintzberg, "*Organizational Design: Fashion or Fit?*", 16.

[25] Ibid., 15.
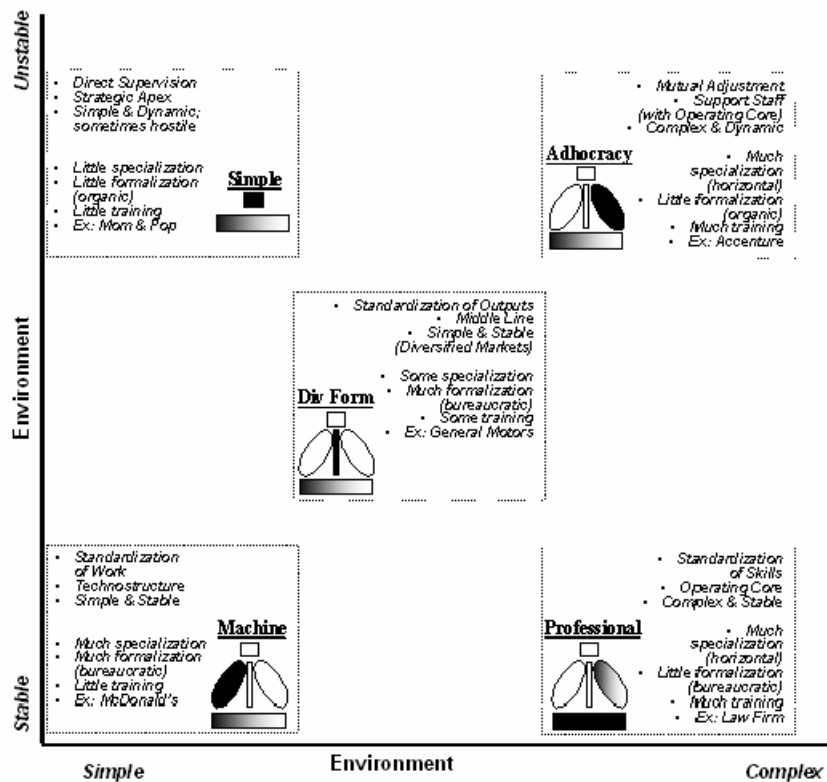
Figure 2. Mintzberg's Structure in Fives

The first of the five configurations is the Simple Structure. This configuration has two levels that include the strategic apex and operating core. This is typical of a start-up or small entrepreneurial company (commonly called "mom-and-pop" company) and it uses direct supervision by the strategic apex as its coordination mechanism. Its main strength is its capability to maneuver quickly in an unstable environment since the size is relatively small. In contrast, a limitation of the simple structure is the neglect of long-term strategy if the strategic apex gets too involved in the company's day-to-day activities.

The second of the five configurations is the Machine Bureaucracy, which is dominated by the technostructure. It standardizes the work processes as its coordination mechanism. This works because of the simple nature of the tasks and the stable organizational environment. In many ways this is the classic organizational structure, most commonly represented by businesses based on standard operating procedures (such

as McDonald's). These organizations have many levels of hierarchy topped by the strategic apex, which is concerned with long-term strategies, middle management working local level actions, and the operating core performing simple and repetitive tasks of producing food for customers. This setup allows the business to gain efficiency from the bureaucratic structure and puts the technostructure at the forefront since they are charged with standardizing processes and inspecting their performance. Because the work at the operator level is simple and often mundane, motivation is sometimes problematic.

The third of the five configurations is the Professional Bureaucracy. This configuration has a large operating core and usually has few managerial levels between the strategic apex and the operating core. University or law offices are two examples of this configuration. The primary coordination mechanism is the standardization of skills since most of the operating core is highly trained prior to entering the organization and each individual within the organization feels a certain amount of motivation to meet professional standards. These highly trained individuals execute complex tasks in a stable environment. This configuration creates some unique challenges. The operating core, because its individuals are highly specialized, can become isolated from the other parts of the organization. This causes difficulty in assessing quality control and also responding to a rapidly changing environment. "The result is a paradox: individual professionals may be at the forefront of their specialty, while the institutions as a whole changes at a glacial pace."[26]

The fourth of the five configurations is the Divisionalized Form. This configuration is characterized by a company like General Motors or a multi-specialty hospital with the middle line manager at the forefront of the organization. Because these organizations have diversified product lines, they can operate in moderately unstable environments and complete tasks that range from simple to complex. As a result, they use standardization of products as the coordination mechanism. It is readily evident that this configuration can be extremely difficult to manage effectively from the view of the strategic apex. The benefits to this configuration are much like a mutual fund in that

---

[26] Bolman and Deal, 77.

diversity can reduce risk and the company can benefit from ample resources. Some problem areas include competition between divisions or with the corporate headquarters. In addition, headquarters may find it difficult to stay in touch with all divisions and therefore must trust its division leaders to ensure success. However, this is the favored, or established, structural form of the United States military. As in the *Mayaguez* incident, communication through multiple layers in the divisionalized form is no easy accomplishment.

The fifth of the five configurations is Adhocracy. This "is a loose, flexible, self-renewing organic form tied together mostly through lateral means."[27] Examples include "think tanks" and advertising agencies that exist in turbulent environments requiring extreme flexibility. The support staff is the focal point of the organization and the primary coordination mechanism is mutual adjustment.[28] Mutual adjustment is a type of freewheeling and allows highly creative people to interact under an umbrella of ambiguity. The end result would likely be positive exploration that yields benefits to the organization. These organizations can survive in unstable environments that require complex tasks to be executed. A problem can arise if external pressures push them to formalize. If the environment requires them to be more formalized or standardized, the organization may not survive as it exists and may need to reconfigure which can cost the organization its workforce.

Mintzberg's Structure of Fives revealed structural problems as well as faulty coordination mechanisms between the parts of the organization involved in the *Mayaguez* incident. The predominant problem, however, was the strategic apex and its interaction with the remainder of the organization. This is further discussed in Chapter III.

E.   HUMAN RESOURCE FRAME

This frame emphasizes the study of psychological perspective of work. It views an organization as a large, extended family.[29] In contrast to the structural frame that

---

[27] Bolman and Deal, 77.

[28] Mintzberg, "*Organizational Design: Fashion or Fit?*", 4.

[29] Bolman and Deal, 14.

focused on the organization as a rational system of roles, the human resource frame sees many individuals who possess needs, emotions, capabilities and limitations. As a result, organizations and managers need to understand people and work to create a symbiotic relationship between workers and their work place. This linkage is further defined by the human resource frames core assumptions:[30]

- Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse.
- People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
- When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organizations—or both become victims.
- A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed.

The human resource frame is useful for analyzing often non-quantifiable human factors that affect the organization.

Three of the four core assumptions deal directly with establishing a true symbiotic relationship between the individual and the organization. Achieving this balance satisfies all parties and meets the needs of the individual while keeping the organization on track to succeed. A symbiotic balance such as this appears in nature between many animals and makes life better for each animal as a result. This is the goal of the human resource frame. However, a common problem is organizations are sometimes built with inherent conflict because an improper configuration exists from the start. This results in the needs of the individual not being met. Chris Argyris observed this conflict because the structure and method of management did not meet the needs of the individuals.[31] In addition, Argyris believed many organizations treated individuals like children and did not realize people have basic self-actualization tendencies. This mismatch of people and the organization must be understood and properly identified by management to reduce possible conflict.

To build and implement a strong human resource philosophy, Bolman and Deal provide some overall guidance and practices that should assist in achieving harmony

---

[30] Bolman and Deal, 115.

[31] Argyris, Chris. *Integrating the Individual and the Organization*, 32.

between individuals and the organization. The human resource table below summarizes the principles that should be part of any successful human resource strategy:[32]

Table 2.   Human Resource Principles and Practices.

Human Resource Principle	Specific Practices
Build and Implement a Human Resource Management Strategy	Develop a Shared Philosophy for Managing People Build Systems/Practices to Implement Philosophy
Hire the Right People	Know What You Want and Be selective
Keep Them	Reward Well and Protect Jobs Promote from Within and Share the Wealth
Invest in Them	Invest in Learning Create Development Opportunities
Empower Them	Provide Information and Support Encourage Autonomy and Participation Redesign Work and Foster Self-Managing Teams Promote Egalitarianism
Promote Diversity	Be Explicit and Consistent about the Organization's Delivery Philosophy Hold Managers Accountable

After reviewing the table, it is clear an organization must first commit to manage with human resources and nurture that relationship. A successful outcome would be reciprocation by the individuals to perform at their highest capability. In short, take care of the people's needs and they will take care of the organizational needs. In the *Mayaguez* incident, providing intelligence likely would have fostered confidence in the leadership dictating the operation. Because it was not provided or it was inaccurate if provided, this alienated the operators from the leadership. The operators no longer felt the keys to their success were supported at the executive level. Though the military is known for its fortitude and adaptability, President Ford's decision to combine units that had never worked together in a mission none of the units had attempted was extremely risky. Though one might think this conveyed utmost confidence in the troops by the

---

[32] Bolman and Deal, 136.

executive level, it actually had the opposite effect as the troops felt they were operating in a vacuum, "left to fend for themselves."[33]

F. POLITICAL FRAME

This frame, derived from political science, views an organization as a jungle or arena with a struggle for power and competition over scarce resources. The formation of coalitions is key and techniques such as bargaining, negotiation, coercion, and compromise are included in everyday activities. "Commitment . . . suggests that we can build alliances by getting others to do favors for us."[34] Favors typically lead to commitments which then lead to coalitions, as seen in government politics. This frame is typically represented by governmental structure. As issues arise, the sponsors of legislation work vigorously to build coalitions that support their position. During this process, individuals may try to leverage any power or influence they possess to develop support to attain resources to achieve their goals. This political process is said to be inevitable in any organization and managers need to understand how to use this frame to better understand their organization.

Bolman and Deal list five propositions to summarize the complex web of interactions between individuals and group interest:[35]

- Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups.
- There are enduring differences among coalition members in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
- Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources—who gets what.
- Scarce resources and enduring differences make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underline power as the most important asset.
- Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders.

The Department of Defense (DoD) exemplifies the above propositions. Each service component represents a coalition with special operations cutting across the services with its own coalition. Each coalition or group has unique interests such as

---

[33] Col. (Ret.) James Davis, Interview with authors, August 30, 2005.

[34] Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Managing with Power*, 198.

[35] Bolman and Deal, 186.

purchasing land-based equipment versus modernizing airframes. As each group jockeys for position, they defend their need to receive funding or the scarce resources of the DoD. When one party perceives another party is preventing attainment of its goals, conflict arises. "Each party forms its own interpretation of the situation," commonly referred to as conceptualization or framing.[36] Persons who have served in the Pentagon can attest to the conflicts that develop as resources are allocated to each group. On occasion, the joint process of acquisition or a political civilian leader may affect the decision process via negotiations, prioritization or are trumped by civilian use of power.

A key influence in the political frame is power. Each organization has a unique power distribution or lack thereof in some cases. According to Dr. Jeffrey Pfeffer, power is "the potential ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things they would not otherwise do."[37] Power in an organization is the ability to get things accomplished. This power can be derived from a coalition or an authority figure in the organization. Bolman and Deal list eight sources of power that have been derived by multiple sources: Position Power (authority), Information and Expertise, Control of Rewards, Coercive Power, Alliances and Networks, Access and Control of Agendas, Framing, and Personal Power.[38] Those who formally do not possess power in the organization or who exist at lower levels can use many of these power sources to overcome their position of disadvantage. Even when in a formal position of authority, one may find they do not possess the necessary power or influence to accomplish the job. John Kotter, a noted leadership expert, calls this a "power gap" and suggests that using the above list of power sources to close this gap as a manager.[39]

Power often can often be a source of conflict within an organization. Many people fear conflict or feel it is a negative, but this is not entirely true. Florence Heffron

---

[36] Heffron, Florence A. *Organization Theory and Public Organizations: The Political Connection.* NJ:Apprentice Hall, 1989, 184.

[37] Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1992, 30.

[38] Ibid., 195–6.

[39] Kotter, John P. *Power and Influence: Beyond Formal Authority.* New York: Free Press, 1985, 117.

states, "Conflict has benefits as well as costs. . . . Conflict challenges the status quo and stimulates interest and curiosity. It is the root of personal and social change, creativity, and innovation."[40] The real challenge in organizations is to properly manage this conflict. Poorly managed conflict brings negative outcomes to the organization instead of stimulating innovation and growth. Bolman and Deal identify key boundaries or interfaces, such as departments or levels in organizations as the most likely source of conflict. Congress and the NSC are naturally at odds (and thus, create a boundary) when it comes to military operations. Congress wants to be informed of every detail while the NSC requires the operational details be closely guarded.

Managers who seek to understand the political frame must be able to identify these areas of conflict and create the right environment allowing a positive outcome. Furthermore, their position alone will more than likely fail to provide the overarching power they expect. Instead, managers have to draw from the power sources listed by Bolman and Deal if they are to get the job done or effect the change they desire. President Ford, eager to prove himself worthy of the presidential position, likely was heavily influenced by the political frame. Combined with the symbolic frame, powerful influences affected his decisions during the *Mayaguez* incident.

G. SYMBOLIC FRAME

The symbolic frame draws on social and cultural anthropology and views organizations as tribes or theaters.[41] The symbolic frame minimizes rationality and explains organizations in terms of cultures that are ripe in "rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes, and myths than by rules, policies, and managerial authority."[42] Organizations may also be viewed as theaters where actors play specific roles in an organizational drama. "Problems arise when actors blow their parts, when symbols lose their meaning, or when ceremonies and rituals lose their potency." Furthermore, the use of symbols, myths, and magic may be used to rebuild lost spirit in the organization. A leader can influence an organization merely through his actions as he is a symbol of how to act, how

---

[40] Heffron, Florence A. *Organization Theory and Public Organizations*, 185.

[41] Bolman and Deal, p 15.

[42] Ibid., 15.

to dress, or how to lead. Symbolism works because they "appeal less to reason and more to [emotion]."[43] The objective of the symbolic frame is to understand how symbols in organizations become so powerful.

As mentioned in previous sections, frames are used to better package multidiscipline approaches to provide better understanding to a manager. The symbolic frame pulls from many resources and provides the following core assumptions:[44]

- What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
- Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events have multiple meanings because people interpret experience differently.
- In the face of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
- Many events and processes are more important for what is expressed than what is produced. They form a cultural tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories that help people find purpose and passion in their personal and work lives.
- Culture is the glue that holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs.

In the symbolic frame, perhaps the most significant assumption is that of culture and the effect it has on the organization. For this reason, culture is often synonymous with symbolic when using the frames approach to organizational theory. It is also representative of a more contemporary approach to organizational theory than that of traditional topics such as rational actors and objectivity. The importance of culture to an organization is profound. Culture can dictate every aspect of an organization to include its actions and outputs and the culture of the organization can also alter the individual's actions. "Culture both a product and a process."[45] "Symbols are powerful indicators of organizational dynamics" and "acquire meaning in the organization through recurring experiences."[46] Managers who understand the impact of culture and symbols on an organization can better apply their leadership and operate the organization effectively.

---

[43]Kotter, John P. *Power and Influence*, 91.

[44] Ibid., 242.

[45] Bolman and Deal, 243.

[46] Wilderom, Celeste P.M., Mark Peterson, and Neal Ashkanasy, eds. *Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000, 73.

Symbols can simplify, clarify, and bring together an organization under even the most confusing of circumstance or environment.[47] "Symbolism not only affects how people perceive events, but it also influences actions."[48] For instance, the feeling the American flag imposes on a person ranges from freedom to simple patriotism, but most notably, it unifies them under a single movement acting in concert tied to emotion. (McDonald's golden arches unify all individual franchises under the umbrella of a single organization whether domestically or internationally located.) Symbols can range from myths, ceremonies, superheroes, to simple graphics such as Superman's "S". The use of symbols is so powerful that often in problem organizations, simply introducing an effective symbol for individuals to relate to can unify previously deeply divided components. The symbolic frame "offers powerful insight into fundamental issues of meaning and belief and possibilities for bonding people into a cohesive group with a shared mission."[49] President Ford did not perceive the strong influence upon him of the symbology of America as a weak superpower. Though he was aware he needed to improve America's image both domestically and internationally, he did not understand how this frame likely narrowed his perception of events, thereby making his decisions faulty.

Frames provide the leadership with a means to gather, process, and sort information critical to the organization's success. In the *Mayaguez* incident, President Ford's frames of reference dramatically affected and hastened the process of decision making. He felt political pressure because of the way he came into the presidency. He subverted the human resource frame by assuming the military could overcome shortages and inexperience. He felt pressured by the symbology of America as a weakened superpower. If the president had understood the effects framing and structure can have on decision making, it might have enabled him to include more information or allow more time to process the decision of an air assault campaign with an ill-equipped organization.

---

[47] Bolman and Deal, 269.

[48] Jones, Michael O. *Studying Organizational Symbolism: What, How, Why?* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996, 4.

[49] Bolman and Deal, 332.

27

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

III. MINTZBERG'S STRUCTURE IN FIVES

Examining the *Mayaguez* Incident through the structural frame using Henry Mintzberg's theory of structural configuration provides one of many approaches to understanding the event. Mintzberg's theory, as described in Chapter II, describes how an organization fits within the context of the organization's environment and the organization's tasks. Success occurs when the organizational structure, decision authority, and coordination mechanisms match the environment and tasks.

In this document, the focus is on the strategic apex and how the chief decision maker's actions affected the structure and coordinating mechanisms of the organization. These changes in structure and coordinating mechanisms had a vital impact on the outcome of the military's mission.

A. DIVISIONALIZED FORM

The executive level of the United States government and the DoD most closely resembles Mintzberg's divisional form. In this structure, a single strategic apex controls multiple middle lines, each with their own specialized task. The president and close advisors (Cabinet members, Whitehouse staff) form the strategic apex and DoD makes up one of the substructures within divisionalized form. The Department of Defense, led by the Secretary of Defense and member of the NSC, has its own multiple divisions whose middle line managers include Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) and service chiefs. As discussed in Chapter II, the middle line directs the dominant mode of coordination, which is standardization of outputs.

The requirement for standardization of outputs is for the strategic apex to uniformly compare outputs of multiple organizations within the divisionalized structure. Standardization of outputs in a business context can be accomplished by comparing the net worth of separate divisions within the organization.[50] For the military, the output to be standardized is the ability for the division to utilize its resources to achieve its mission objective with acceptable losses.

---

[50] Mintzberg, "*Organization Design Fashion or Fit?*", 10.

Each separate middle line manager is responsible for the personnel below him and is responsible for the outputs of his or her division (see Figure 3). Success of the organization relies somewhat on the autonomy of the division heads.[51] Prior to execution of hostilities in the *Mayaguez* incident, the middle line consisted of CINCPAC (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command), PACFLEET (Pacific Command Fleet), and PACAF (Commander, Pacific Command Air Force)[52]. Later, due to the actions of the president, the middle line was replaced by members of the strategic apex, rendering the established middle line ineffective.
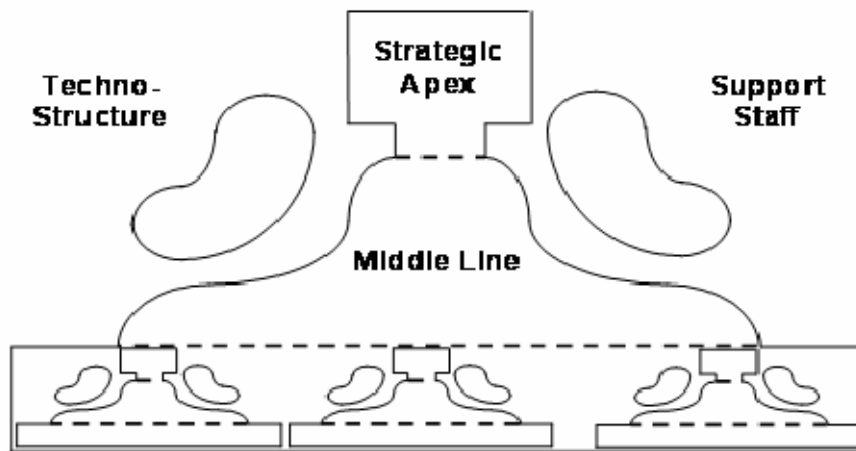
Figure 3. Mintzberg's Divisionalized Form

The strategic apex, with the president at the top, began in the traditional form as the NSC. The output sought by the strategic apex was an effective armed assault to recover the SS *Mayaguez* and her crew. The organization's ability to conduct the operation was severely hampered, however, when the president overstepped his boundaries within the strategic apex. It is unknown whether this was a conscious or subconscious maneuver, but nonetheless it is an obvious action as evidenced in the NSC

---

[51] Mintzberg, "*Organization Design Fashion or Fit?*", 9.

[52] See Appendix G, CINCPAC Command Relationships.

minutes following the incident.[53] Again, the thesis focuses on examining the actions of the strategic apex throughout the ordeal, where the greatest insight into the failures of the operation is revealed.

The divisionalized structure works especially well for the armed forces. Each military specialty can organize, train and equip under a single chain of command. Air combat, ground combat and sea combat forces specialize to become effective in their individual arenas. The military can somewhat control the training situation or at least choose favorable timing for their training, creating a somewhat stable environment. The military in a training environment also can define the task or problem and attempt to keep the task from becoming too complex. When the environment is complex, training allows for timelines to be adjusted to allow for development of effective coordinating mechanisms. The result is a structure that passes directives from senior leaders to the middle line managers who implement them within their division to achieve a certain capability or output.

The Divisional Form can hold different types of structures from division to division within the overall organization. This design allows flexibility within the organization yet retains rigidity amongst the individual parts. For example, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines all have flexibility in how they conduct operations but they are unyielding in how they use the chain of command. Some divisions, such as logistics units, are highly specialized and highly formalized much like a machine bureaucracy. Other divisions, such as task forces, are highly specialized and highly trained with little formalization. They are much like a professional bureaucracy, where the operators are given a goal and expected to provide a solution based on their training.[54] Hence, DoD operates as a divisionalized form consisting of a mixture of structures.

During wartime, DoD's typically conventional approach involves application of vast resources over a specified amount of time prior to an engagement. The divisionalized structure remains intact, allowing its leadership to rely on an established command and communication lines previously utilized and practiced in training.

---

[53] See all appendices of the National Security Council Minutes, May 12–15, 1975.

[54] Mintzberg, "*Organization Design Fashion or Fit?*", 6.

31

B. STRUCTURAL FORM DURING THE *MAYAGUEZ* INCIDENT

In peacetime, the military practices its job under coordination mechanisms that are structured to accomplish both complex and simple tasks in a relatively stable environment. During wartime or contingency operations, however, forces are normally detached from their organizing, training and equipping chains of command and realigned under a GCC. The intent of rearranging the command lines is to match the operating core of combat forces to a middle line whose focus is on applying combat power. The new chain of command additionally includes a large number of mission planners, intelligence specialists and personnel familiar with the area of operations. These specialists make up the support staff that is in place to aid the assigned combat force. The GCC is built to provide regional expertise and situational awareness.

Organizations use horizontal coordinating mechanisms to address complexity and instability. The operating core is empowered to "fuse experts drawn from different specialties into smoothly functioning, creative teams."[55] Organizations also use mutual adjustment through support staffs to deal with a complex task in an unstable environment. For the *Mayaguez* incident, the GCC that should have facilitated horizontal coordination and mutual adjustment was Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command (CINCPAC). Unfortunately, CINCPAC did not fulfill this role because the president and his staff bypassed the middle line and directly supervised portions of the mission. This affected all operations, to include communications between the units. The units directly involved in the action needed to coordinate their movements, resupply, fire support, close air support and extraction but were not able to speak to each other due to the fact that each of the separate functions did not know what radio frequency the other units were using.[56] While this is not the fault of the executive level, it is resultant of the fact that the middle line was bypassed, so standard methods for coordinating communication were never executed. Mutual adjustment and horizontal coordination mechanisms are difficult to build during an operation if the support structure is disengaged.

---

[55] Mintzberg, "*Organization Design Fashion or Fit?*", 10.

[56] Dan Hoffman, e-mail message to authors, August 30, 2005.
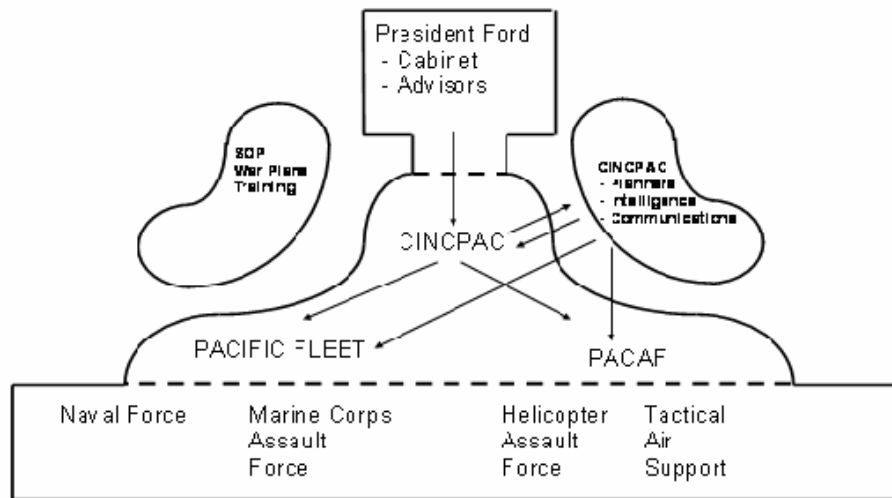
Figure 4. Mintzberg's Divisionalized Form During the *Mayaguez* Incident (ideal)

In some organizations, the way things are supposed to happen and the way they are executed are often not similar. Influences from other factors such as leadership, politics and external pressures can sway the organization away from its formally designed structure. During the *Mayaguez* incident, President Ford consolidated power at the strategic apex. Mintzberg notes that consolidation of power at the strategic apex is normal during periods of hostility.[57] But while consolidation is normal, this strengthening of power had far-reaching effects, changing the structure of the organization and mission execution.

The strategic apex in the United States military chain of command normally includes the president, vice president, director of the CIA, and secretaries of state and defense; however, based on the declassified NSC meeting minutes, President Ford specified his role as the sole decision maker.[58] This relegated the vice president, secretary of state, and director of the CIA to administrative functions, in effect placing them squarely in the middle line. The National Military Command Center (NMCC) shifted to the technostructure and became the conduit through which planning and

---

[57] Mintzberg, "*Organization Design Fashion or Fit?*", 5.

[58] National Security Council Memorandum for the Record. Wednesday, May 14, 1975, 6:40pm-8:00pm. Gerald Ford Library.

standards for mission execution bypassed the organization. The SECDEF and CJCS also became part of the middle line, which already included the Local Command. In the beginning, the Local Command had direct control over the operating core—the units tasked with mission execution, USS Coral Sea, USS Holt, Boarding Party, Koh Tang Marine Assault Force, 41st Rescue and Recovery Wing, the tactical fighters, and 56th Special Operations Wing. As time progressed, the strategic apex centralized his power causing the middle line to grow and become ineffective. The original middle line—PACOM and its support staff— were demoted to an administrative staff role as well.
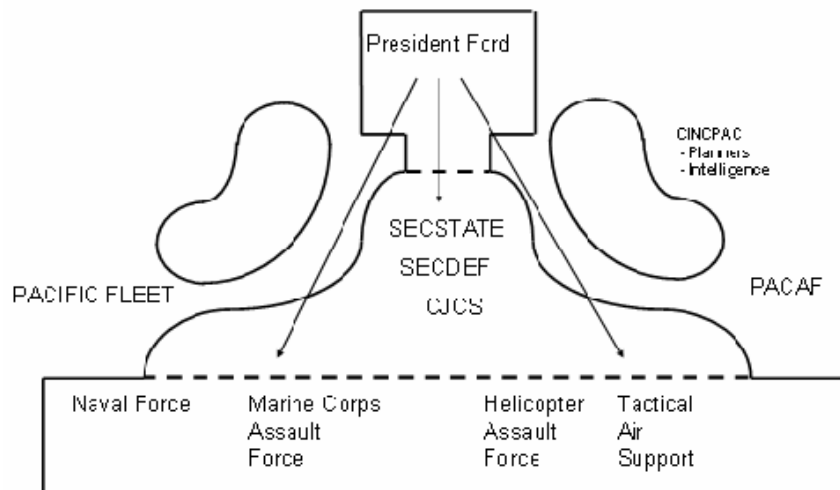
Figure 5. Mintzberg's Divisionalized Form During the *Mayaguez* Incident (in practice)

By forcing the middle line to take administrative staff roles, the president alienated those who were normally authorized to take action. This broke down the ability for the units involved to secure resources from their normal middle line support structures. With the president controlling the participants directly from the Whitehouse, the middle managers could not engage their support staffs to assist the assault force operating core.

The CINCPAC support staff was needed in the *Mayaguez* Operation to deal with the situational and organizational complexity. The Marine assault force needed a way to

order resources and coordinate with the other units involved in the operation to include the helicopter squadron from the Air Force and the air support from both the Navy and the Air Force. When multiple requests for intelligence photos were denied or made unavailable essentially because the middle line had been bypassed, Col. (Ret.) James Davis, a Marine company commander who took his troops to Koh Tang Island, personally flew in a light observation aircraft with a handheld camera to get intelligence photos of the island before the attack. Because of altitude constraints, however, his photographs were of limited use. As he and his troops were preparing for takeoff aboard the running helicopters, he was finally handed the reconnaissance photographs he had requested much earlier. The photographs showed there were anti-aircraft weapons and large troop concentrations on the island that the assault force was totally unaware of until that point.[59] This greatly increased the risk and complexity of the mission.

Simple structures and vertical mechanisms of control work sufficiently well when there are simple tasks in an unstable environment, but complex tasks in an unstable environment often fail under the uncomplicated configuration. As in the Law of Requisite Variety, "the greater the variety within a system, the greater its ability to reduce variety in its environment through regulation."[60] In consolidating power, President Ford shifted the organization to look more like a simple rather than complex structure, similar to an autocracy.[61] A single decision maker, wielding the power to change and direct the workforce can have immediate impact on outputs. In the case of the *Mayaguez*, the output should have been an effective military operation to recover the ship and crew. However, the impact of President Ford's consolidation of power reduced the effectiveness to the point of output failure. The support staffs were essentially cut out of the designed structure. Figure 6 below shows Mintzberg's simple structure or autocracy.

59 Col. (Ret.) James Davis, Interview with authors, August 30, 2005.

60 Principia Cybernetica Web. http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/LAW_VARIE.html

61 Mintzberg, Henry. *Power In and Around Organizations.* Prentice-Hall:Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1983.

Strategic Apex

Operating Core
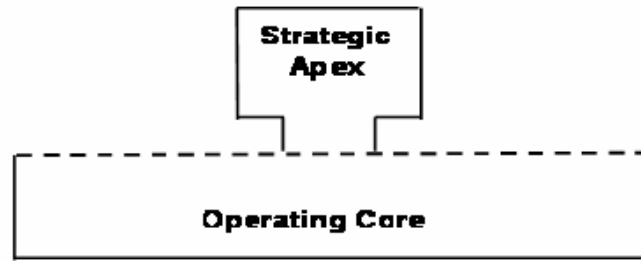
Figure 6.   Mintzberg's Simple Structure or Autocracy

The weakness with a simple structure or autocracy is ". . . that when the CEO becomes . . . so wedded to his strategy that he cannot perceive the need to change it, the very survival of the organization becomes threatened."[62]   In a complex environment a single leader cannot filter and process such massive amounts of information. Cultural factors for the Khmer Rouge, diplomatic factors, military capabilities and processes all flooding in within a short time period could not be accurately sorted by a single person. This was further amplified because that same person was preoccupied with relaying direct, tactical decisions to the operating core. In one case, President Ford spoke by radio directly with a fighter pilot flying over the waters near Cambodia.[63]   This shows the incredible level that direct supervision was being used.

Direct supervision—the coordinating mechanisms during the final stages of the operation—was without any connectivity to the established organization.   This was evident in every survivor interview; each stated they did not speak to one another but relied on the fact that things just happened and each component would do its job. Fortunately, the nature of the military is to be flexible and adaptive. In the case of the *Mayaguez*, it was the operating core that functioned as a well-trained team—mutually adjusting and deploying their skills in spite of the remainder of the organization. Of course, it functioned as a matter of survival rather than a matter of effective organizational structure.

---

[62] Mintzberg, Henry. *Power In and Around Organizations*, 358.

[63] *Seized at Sea: Situation Critical: The Story of the Mayaguez Crisis*. DVD. Produced, directed, and written by Brian Kelly. Alexandria, VA: Henninger Productions, 2000.

36

President Ford should have forwarded his objectives through the NSC to the middle line, which in turn, should have been conveyed to the operating core. (Need quote here about the importance of transmitting the organization's goal to the lowest levels.) Furthermore, the middle line should have been afforded the authority to act autonomously to achieve the organizational goal. In a divisionalized form, the "key assumption is that if the division managers are to be responsible for the performance of their divisions, they must have considerable autonomy to manage them as they see fit. Hence there is extensive delegation of authority from headquarters to the level of division manager."[64]

The essential organizational structures were in place at the onset of the *Mayaguez* incident but the president consolidated power in his own position at the strategic apex, thereby pushing down the Secretary of Defense to the middle line and relegating the true middle line to more of an administrative function. The simple structure he created did not fit in the complex environment. The operating core was left without an effective support staff and paid the price in casualties. President Ford's consolidation of power at the strategic apex may have been a response to perceived hostility but was likely also precipitated by other factors discussed in the frames chapter.

[64] Mintzberg, Henry. and Quinn, James B. *The Strategy Process: Cases, Concepts, Cases*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991, 706.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

IV.   FRAMES

The difficult task when analyzing organizations and the actions of their leaders is choosing the correct frame(s) in which to view the occurrence or situation. In order to achieve the desired results of the organizational process, a suitable level of understanding is required when selecting the frame(s) through which to view an event. Bolman and Deal offer four interpretations (Structural, Human Resource, Political and Symbolic) of the frames analysis to facilitate selection of relevant frames. As previously discussed, frames are lenses through which observation is conducted in order to gain perspective and/or understanding of actions and responses.

In this chapter, analysis of the *Mayaguez* incident is concentrated at the executive level to help understand the democratic decision-making process at the strategic apex. Using the frames analysis will foster a larger perspective of a specific event in an extremely difficult and complex environment. Inappropriately framing an event or situation places the decision maker in a precarious situation with a low degree of fidelity. Additionally, trying to comprehend the exigency of the situation and choosing the correct frame can be extremely difficult.

Trying to match the correct frame to a particular situation can be demanding and can require an intricate understanding of the process. "For a given time and situation, one perspective may be more helpful than others. At a strategic crossroads, a rational process focused on gathering and analyzing information may be more helpful."[65] Selecting the perspective—or frame—is the art of framing and reframing situations to understand the meaning. To alleviate the confusion amongst the frames and cope with the uncertainty of deciding between them, Bolman and Deal developed a model for choosing the correct frame at the correct point in time. Table 3 poses questions to facilitate analysis and suggests the conditions under which a particular frame is likely to be most effective. In the case of the *Mayaguez* incident, framing and reframing the event using the table helps reduce ambiguity and bring together the analysis. The focal point of

---

[65] Bolman and Deal, 309

the frames analysis is the NSC and their individual commitment to the crisis, the technical quality of the decisions, degree of understanding, and the resources available for the operation.

Table 3.   Choosing a Frame

	YES	NO
Is individual commitment and motivation essential to success?	Human Resource Symbolic	Structural Political
Is the technical quality of the decision important?	Structural	Human Resource Political Symbolic
Is there a high level of ambiguity and uncertainty?	Political Symbolic	Structural Human Resource
Are conflict and scarce resources significant?	Political Symbolic	Structural Human Resource
Are you working from the bottom up?	Political Symbolic	Structural Human Resource

Several lines of recent research find that effective leaders and effective organizations rely on multiple frames. "[Leaders] can use frames as scenarios . . . to generate alternative approaches to challenging circumstances."[66] Using a frame, one can focus on a moment in time, a scene, or a set of ideas. Framing and reframing are a set of skills employed to one degree or another by the leader.

The essential tool of any manager is the ability to frame, particularly in a large, diversified or divisionalized structure. Using frames, a leader can make sense of a situation, subject, or object as well as judge its character and relative significance. In applying frames, a leader applies a particular meaning to the topic at hand. We define meaning when we ascertain that our interpretation is as valid as any other possible

---

66 Bolman and Deal, 333.

interpretation.[67] Even when frames are applied (consciously or subconsciously), people are inclined to use one frame over another to interpret a situation sometimes failing to make accurate or complete assessment of a situation. Knowledge of the frames approach should alert the leader to the importance of applying all possible frames in order to leverage the best possible solution.

For example, in a scenario in which employee morale is poor, the human relations frame might have more significance than the structural frame. "Rather than reorganize and restructure to improve production or conditions, it is likely more important to discover what is truly affecting the employees and include them in the process".[68] In the case of the *Mayaguez*, the structural frame was, at best, faulty. Although the brave men of the *Mayaguez* incident pulled the mission together with guts and determination, the organizational structure was highly suspicious from its inception. It was critical that the president use multiple frames of reference to view the situation through different perspectives. Using this approach, he would have likely made decisions based on more robust and properly contextualized information and then subsequently, develop an organization that could accomplish the mission.

A.   THE STRUCTURAL FRAME

As discussed in Chapter III, the organization became powerless as President Ford assumed the entire function of the NSC. By reserving sole decision-making authority, he removed a capable organization with a high degree of experience and hindered their ability to participate in the process. It is important to note that by assuming all decision-making capability, President Ford changed the structure of the organization, remaining alone atop the strategic apex. The president, feeling pressure from his environment, perceived an urgent need to move quickly to rescue the *Mayaguez* and her crew. He consolidated authority at the presidential level bypassing the middle line and senior staff, which limited the organization's ability to plan and organize effectively.

---

[67]Fairhurst, Gail T., and Robert A. Sarr. *The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996, 22.

[68] National Defense University. Strategic Leadership and Decision Making. http://www.au.af.mil/au/aw. Accessed April 1, 2006.

The major challenge for the president was to lead a large, complex set of activities and set goals under conditions of uncertainty.[69] While addressing the NSC, President Ford avouched, "as Commander-in-Chief, I have the right to use military force . . . and regardless of the 1973 law,[70] I have the authority to take action."[71] President Ford's perceived need to act decisively and quickly further exacerbated the complexity of the task and the instability of the environment in which the NSC was operating. Viewed through the structural frame, President Ford subconsciously changed the architecture of the organization and acting as the sole strategic apex member, he came to believe he was entitled to full and singular decision-making authority.

B.   THE HUMAN RESOURCE FRAME

"The human resource frame emphasizes an understanding of people, their strengths and weaknesses, reasons and emotions, desires and fears."[72] According to Kotter, a challenge of leadership is to "motivate, coordinate, and control a large group of subordinates."[73] Additionally, the human resource frame purports an existing strong linkage between the needs of the employee, the alignment of individual and organizational needs, interpersonal and group dynamics, and management approaches. A poor fit between the organization and its employees leads to ineffective performance.[74] In the case of the *Mayaguez*, the principles of the human resource frame were non-existent. Organizations exist to serve human needs.[75]

In an effort to bring the president's staff and organization in synchronization, Ford provided his vision of short and long-term goals and direction to rally his National Security Council (NSC). President Ford specified three objectives in the

---

[69] Kotter, John P. *The General Managers.* New York: Free Press, 1982, 20.

[70] President Ford is referring to the War Powers Act of 1973 that states the President shall consult with Congress before introducing Armed Forces into hostilities.

[71] National Security Council Memorandum for the Record. Wednesday, May 14, 1975, 6:40pm-8:00pm. Gerald Ford Library

[72] Bolman and Deal, 18.

[73] Kotter, *The General Managers*, 21.

[74] Bolman and Deal, 115.

[75] Ibid., 115.

Mayaguez crisis: "first, to recover the ship and crew; second to avoid the possibility of hostage negotiations; and third, to mount a demonstrative use of U.S. force to bolters America's international credibility."[76] The plan was to overwhelm a weaker enemy with superior force and rescue the hostages with lightning-fast precision. However, there were two human resource problems working against the president during the *Mayaguez*.

The first problem was the National Security Council and their devolving capability to influence the operation. The members of the NSC were operating under an extremely compressed timeline, and the president wanted quick results. Although President Ford hired competent and qualified people to serve on his staff, he failed to empower them and encourage autonomy to solve the *Mayaguez* crisis. If the staff had been empowered, they may have developed a more complete strategy with a shared philosophy, overcoming the narrow focus of the president. Additionally, including more personnel in the process might have produced alternative options not yet considered by President Ford. As seen in the NSC minutes in Appendix E, the president often stifled other suggestions made by members of the NSC to fulfill his interest in attacking the Cambodian mainland. When a president decides to exert his powers as Commander-in-Chief, he naturally interferes with standard operating procedures.[77]

The second failure within the human resource frame was President Ford's inability to manage the organizational conditions so that the people involved with the crisis could achieve their own goals and facilitate resolution of the incident.[78] "[Their] talent will be wasted if the structure, processes, and metrics dissipate their energy and

[76] Guilmartin, John F., Jr. *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995, 38.

[77] Quinn, Kenneth. Mayaguez Paper. Kenneth Quinn to General Scowcroft. 25 Aug 75. "Mayaguez Performance Evaluation – Memoranda 6/75-10/75," Box 8. National Secruity Adviser Staff Assistant John K. Matheny Files. Gerald R. Ford Library.

[78] Bolman and Deal, 119.

create barriers to their collective effectiveness."[79]   Centralizing all decision-making capability around him, President Ford essentially made managing the armed forces executing the rescue impossible.

By consolidating control, the president failed to allow the organization to function properly and achieve the correct mix of personnel for the job. Instead, he forced the hand of his middle line causing a violation of what Bolman and Deal call the Human Resource Principle, "hire the right people, be selective, and encourage autonomy and participation."[80] The soldiers chosen for the operation were those who were immediately available, not specifically trained or organized for the task at hand. The Marines were only six months out of boot camp and did not see any action in Vietnam; however, the Air Force enlisted flight crews were highly experienced (Telephone interview with Marine Ground Commander Colonel (Ret.) Jim Davis, August 29, 2005). The Air Force helicopters were comprised of few special operations helicopters but predominately a rescue unit that had never accomplished or even practiced an air assault prior to the *Mayaguez* crisis. In fact, because the raid on Son Tay still was classified at the time of the incident, no unit in the Air Force had officially planned or accomplished an air assault mission.[81]

C.   THE POLITICAL FRAME

"The political frame [references] organizations as competitive arenas characterized by scarce resources, competing interests, and struggles for power and advantage."[82] It is within this frame that decision making becomes an opportunity to gain or exercise power, to resolve conflict, and realign power if necessary. Because power, coalition, and conflict make up the core of the political frame, negative images usually come to mind when addressing politics. However, viewed through this frame, politics is simply the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a

---

[79] Galbraith, Jay R., Diane Downey and Amy Kates. *Designing Dynamic Organizations: A Hands on Guide for Leaders at All Levels.* New York: American Management Association, 2002, 227.

[80] Bolman and Deal, 136.

[81] Robert Blough. Interview with authors. August 29, 2005.

[82] Bolman and Deal, 18.

context of scarcity and divergent interest. The challenge for President Ford during the *Mayaguez* operation was the scarcity of resources (limited number of trained military personnel and funding), diverging interests (selecting a diplomatic or military option) and proving himself as a worthy world leader.

President Gerald Ford assumed the Presidency in August of 1974 under extraordinary circumstances. He was the first vice president chosen under the terms of the 25th Amendment having been nominated by then President Richard Nixon to replace the resigned Vice President Spiro Agnew. When President Nixon resigned, it opened the door for Vice President Ford to assume the presidency. Not popularly elected to the office, it is possible President Ford felt a need to legitimize his actions and power. The *Mayaguez* incident was an excellent opportunity to restore the face of America after the Vietnam War via the hand of President Ford. However, the *Mayaguez* incident presented the president with an immediate challenge to his power base: Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge regime achieved infamy by massacring millions through execution, starvation and forced labor. It was one of the most violent governments of the 20th century often compared to Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong. For this reason, the United States refused to legitimize the government of Cambodia and, therefore, was reluctant to address them via diplomatic channels. President Ford strongly opposed direct contact with Cambodia to avoid giving credence to a brutal, communist government. Because he would not send a request for release of the *Mayaguez* and her crew directly to the Cambodian government, President Ford needed to build an international coalition to address the problem. China was available as a mediator for the incident, but the United States' treatment of Vietnamese citizens during the war dissuaded the Chinese from forging ties with the U.S. government. The U.S. issued a formal request to Cambodia through the Chinese demanding the release of the hostages; however, the Chinese Embassy refused to accept the message. After the incident—the U.S. discovered that the Chinese only verbally conveyed the message to Cambodia, but to what extent and reception is unknown.[83]

---

[83] National Security Council Memorandum for the Record. Wednesday, May 14, 1975, 6:40pm-8:00pm. Gerald Ford Library.

Another critical link in the international coalition was Thailand. The government of Thailand had made it known that if the United States intended to invade or conduct hostile acts against Cambodia over the *Mayaguez*, it would formally request removal of all American military troops. In the NSC minutes, President Ford acknowledged the Thai government would likely be upset at any U.S. military action against Cambodia, but that the Thais would be "reassured."[84] Failing to believe that the Thai government would follow through with its threat to demand the removal of American troops, President Ford again failed to forge a much-needed link in the international coalition. Using the international arena within the context of the political frame, President Ford could have realigned power from military to diplomatic channels, thereby relieving diverging interests and provide for safe return of the *Mayaguez* and crew.

Another critical aspect of the political frame is conflict. Because time was severely compressed and possibly because of President Ford's perceived need of proven legitimacy, conflict was relatively non-existent. Normally, conflict between the political bodies of the Department of Defense and the Department of State would be readily evident when the NSC considers military action. However, because President Ford had filled his staff with key supporters and because time was severely limited (by the president), the opportunity for conflict was initially reduced. One would think less conflict is healthy but according to Heffron, conflict is a necessary function within an organization. It "encourages new ideas and approaches to problems, stimulating innovation."[85] At one point during the NSC meeting over the *Mayaguez* crisis, Donald Rumsfeld, then Chief of Staff at the White House, said to President Ford, "From the political standpoint, we should get your friends and brief them, so that they can stand up for you."[86] This is a prime example of the president's efforts to limit conflict by surrounding himself with supporters to his cause.

President Ford sent troops into harm's way without a complete understanding of the situation in Koh Tang. President Ford had previously briefed congress on

---

[84] National Security Council Minutes. Tuesday, May 13, 1975, 10:40pm-12:25am. Gerald Ford Library.

[85] Heffron, Florence A. *Organization Theory and Public Organizations*, 185.

[86] National Security Council Minutes. Wednesday, May 14,1975, 3:52pm-5:42pm. Gerald Ford Library.

issues concerning Vietnam and the fall of Saigon in accordance with the War Powers Act.[87] During the *Mayaguez* incident however, President Ford felt he needed to use his presidential might to work outside the limits of the Act. This created turmoil amongst his staff and the Congress. Officially, Congress sent a response to the president through White House spokesman Robert Hartman that demanded consultation as required by the War Powers Act.[88]

D.   THE SYMBOLIC FRAME

"The symbolic frame focuses on issues of meaning and [interpretation]. It puts ritual, ceremony, story, play, and culture at the heart of organizational life."[89] Within the symbolic frame, it is necessary for a leader to develop and convey "credible strategic premises, identify and focus on core activities" and find the meaning behind the task at hand.[90] President Ford, while he developed credible strategy, failed to focus the organization on core activities to discover the purpose of the Cambodian seizure of the *SS Mayaguez*. Cambodia, in a long-standing war with Vietnam, had stationed combat-hardened troops on the island of Koh Tang to prevent its takeover from Vietnam. The Cambodians deemed the U.S. merchant ship SS *Mayaguez* a threat to the island because they feared the United States had sided with Vietnam. This story was unknown to the NSC and president and, if known, drastically would have altered the choices made at all levels of the organization— particularly the strategic apex that selected military action.

Meaning and interpretation are core components of the symbolic frame. The Vietnam War had just ended and the public viewed DoD, military, and administration as incompetent and fallible. The Vietnam War created a need to regain the public's trust

---

[87] Section 4 of the War Powers Act requires the President to report to Congress within 48 hours the basis for, facts surrounding, and estimated duration of the introduction of U.S. Armed Forces in hostilities. The War Powers Act is found as 50 USC S.1541-1548, passed in 1973 over the veto of President Nixon. It purports to spell out the situations under which he may deploy the Forces with and without a Congressional declaration of war. Under the War Powers Act, Ford cited Article II, Section 2 as his authority to send soldiers into combat. Ford made his report to Congress four hours before the expiration of the 48-hour window.

[88] National Security Council Minutes. Wednesday, May 14,1975, 3:52pm–5:42pm. Gerald Ford Library.

[89] Bolman and Deal, 19.

[90] Kotter, as cited in Bolman and Deal, Table 15.4, 316.

and confidence because the administration's ability to conduct and supervise war was non-existent. The Department of Defense wanted a chance to prove they could conduct successful operations and although the *Mayaguez* rescue was a small operation it became an avenue of great hope. The administration sought to alter the perception of the United States in the international arena by executing a swift, decisive military operation to bring home the *Mayaguez* and her crew. The success of this mission would immediately produce 39 heroes (the number of *Mayaguez* crew) for the American public to rally around. Looming in the back of their minds, however, was the previously unsuccessful attempt at hostage rescue on the *USS Pueblo*.

The *USS Pueblo* was a United States Navy vessel sent on an intelligence mission off the coast of North Korea. On January 23, 1968, North Korean naval vessels and MiG jets attacked the *USS Pueblo*, resulting in one soldier killed and several wounded in action. Subsequently, for the next eleven months, the eighty-two surviving crewmembers lived as captives in North Korea. After a series of military and diplomatic blunders by the United States, the North Koreans eventually released the *USS Pueblo* crew on their own accord. This event was a source of great embarrassment to the nation and still fresh in President Ford's mind, serving as an example of how the impact of an event can affect organizational perspective: the *USS Pueblo* became a symbol. Often times, this frame compels an organization to constantly search for its identity creating a need to draft another tale favorable in the public eye.

The people of the United States no longer felt the country was the great superpower it claimed to be. Globally the nation was perceived as weak and often deemed incapable of fulfilling its role as leader of the free world. President Ford felt that if America did not act quickly and decisively during the *Mayaguez* crisis and with sufficient force, it would confirm to Russia, North Korea, and China the United States was vulnerable to defeat. The symbology of a weak America was not acceptable or even believable to President Ford. It was inconceivable America could be anything but a symbol of great power and stature to Americans, but the rest of the world was starting to think otherwise. Both the *USS Pueblo* incident and the Vietnam War combined to threaten America's standing in world politics.

Since the Vietnam War ended only two weeks earlier, those involved in the *Mayaguez* crises seem to face insurmountable odds. Even the American military experienced feelings of tremendous defeat. Casualty numbers were unmentionable and often ambiguous, leading to further depleted levels of morale within the military. The culture within DoD and its political counterparts had become one of survival rather than domination. A great need emerged for the military to prove itself to not only the world, but to the American public and time would be of the essence in creating the new story by which to form the symbolic frame.

In reviewing the four frames of Bolman and Deal's frames of reference—structural, human resource, political, and symbolic—as well as Mintzberg's structure, the analysis of the *Mayaguez* incident is made clearer but still lacks full clarity. Other influences outside the applications of organizational theory can dramatically alter or influence the decisions of the executive level as well as the organization as a whole. However, in the *Mayaguez* incident, these influences do not change the thesis that President Ford altered the organizational structure by acting as the sole member of the strategic apex but merely add clarity to the crisis.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

V.   FINDINGS

The *Mayaguez* incident, in terms of applied concepts of organizational theory, revealed many findings, the most predominant of which was the singularized form of the strategic apex. As previously stated, the traditional definition of the strategic apex is top management, meaning a body of persons collectively managing the organization. In the case of the United States government, top management (Mintzberg's strategic apex) is traditionally thought of as the NSC and the president. In simple organizations, the strategic apex is typically comprised of only one individual because the size of the organization is limited in terms of available personnel. In an organization the size of the United States government with a multitude of qualified and available personnel, it is not likely the strategic apex could operate successfully as a single individual. Additionally it is expected the organization, if it attempts to operate as such, will fail or as a minimum become ineffective. However, during the *Mayaguez* incident, the strategic apex quickly became a single person—the president. This thesis proposes the reason behind the failures encountered during the *Mayaguez* incident was that the organization, traditionally divisionalized, attempted to operate as a simple structure with the president as its sole actor in the strategic apex.

As previously stated, in a simple structure the dominant coordinating mechanism between the strategic apex and the remainder of the organization is based on direct supervision. In the divisionalized form (e.g. the government structure), the coordinating mechanism is standardization of outputs and the middle line accomplishes this by formalization—a task that cannot be created in a compressed timeline. During the *Mayaguez* operation, the president became focused on military action and gave little credence to other ideas proposed by the rest of the NSC. In effect, this isolated him as the sole decision maker who attempted to control the organization through direct supervision. This was exemplified by his direct contact with the fighter pilots (operating core) firing upon the vessels in the waters off of Cambodia.

By directing the fighter pilots, president Ford derailed established coordination mechanisms from the NSC down to the operating core, completely bypassing the middle

line. This made the ability to accomplish or assign tasks difficult or in some cases, not possible, because established standard operating procedures normally executed by the middle line were circumvented. This further fueled the president's perception that he needed to directly intervene. According to Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, the notion of one man leading a massive government and making decisions unilaterally is said to be an oversimplification of any national government.[91] Instead, a leader or "decision-maker" of national policy works as a joint member of a network that includes large organizations and multiple political actors. This argument is logical when the scope of a national government is matched with its dynamic environment. The task of collecting all the relevant information and possessing the needed expertise to make effective decisions as an individual seems unreachable. To add to the complexity, the president's actions were further affected by a phenomenon attributable to frames.

Normally, the Department of State and the Department of Defense have different frames through which they observe world events and possible responses. Instead of opposing one another in their framework, the Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, and the Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, were in agreement for a proposed solution. Kissinger was known as a proponent of hard line foreign policy, often recommending military action in place of diplomatic action. Even when diplomatic action was the solution, it was associated with the possibility that decisive force would follow should the foreign body in question not comply. "Kissinger was emphatic on the use of force [in the *Mayaguez* incident]."[92] Collectively, their frames of reference complimented one another instead of providing opposing viewpoints for more comprehensively developed courses of action. "In a complex and uncertain world, senior managers can't be expected to always choose the alternative that in hindsight produces the best outcome. But good senior managers can be expected to ensure that . . . complex decisions are evaluated through a variety of alternative frames."[93]

---

[91] Allison, Graham & Philip Zelikow. *Essence of Decision Making: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd Ed. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc., 1999, 3.

[92] Rowen, Roy. *The Four Days of the Mayaguez*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975, 141.

[93] Russo, J. Edward and Paul J.H. Schoemaker. *Decision Traps: Ten Barriers to Brilliant Decision-Making and How to Overcome Them*. New York: Doubleday, 1989, 58.

Reviewing the declassified documents shows the lack of fidelity President Ford possessed during this incident. The information pertaining to the threats on the island, the intentions of the Khmer Rouge, the location of the hostages, and the capabilities of the ad-hoc military forces severely impacted the capability of the president to possess enough situational awareness to act appropriately. The ability to collect both critical and timely information to make an effective decision is greatly influenced by those individuals directly surrounding the decision-maker as well as his preferences. This need for information highlights the necessity to develop and maintain clear channels of coordination in the organization. Effectively using the coordination mechanism(s) allows the decision-maker to stay well-informed. In the *Mayaguez* incident, President Ford not only chose to operate as the sole decision-maker, he also acted with limited situational awareness as events unfolded in the *Mayaguez* incident.

The middle line, especially in a divisionalized form, is traditionally most aware of the situation and most able to discern appropriate responses. Because President Ford essentially bypassed the middle line and thus the center of knowledge, he denied himself the situational awareness required for effective decision making. For example, the CIA was aware of the ongoing conflict between Vietnam and Cambodia over Koh Tang Island —a critical piece of information that might have led President Ford to explore a greater number of diplomatic channels rather than commit troops to a heavily fortified island. ". . . U.S. intelligence had a sound grasp of Khmer Rouge tactical capabilities on Koh Tang."[94] This vital piece of information might well have changed the entire outcome.

In addition to errors within the structure and the limited frames of reference through which President Ford viewed the initial *Mayaguez* recovery problem, several outside factors may have influenced his framing and decision making effort. Time and technology were determined to be the most significant outside influences that added to the complex environment in which President Ford operated. For example, though the situation at hand in the *Mayaguez* incident was complex, it was manageable until President Ford applied inordinate time constraints. This reduced the ability to separate the task of retrieving the crew from the perceived need for urgent military action.

---

[94] Guilmartin, John F., Jr. *A Very Short War: The Mayaguez and the Battle of Koh Tang*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995, 36.

Time constraints—real or supposed—often cause conflict and pressure. Richard Nixon accurately observed that the American public would only allow a finite amount of time to accomplish a mission, something President Ford remembered well.[95] With Vietnam, the *USS Pueblo*, anti-war sentiment and deep concern for how the American public would view his actions, President Ford centralized the power and held all decision-making authority in the interest of saving time. However, his quick decisions were at the expense of planning, preparation, organization and human lives. If the Khmer Rouge moved the crew to mainland Cambodia, President Ford and his cabinet felt they would not be able to negotiate for their release. President Ford, in Rowan's book states, "I had to assume that if this fishing boat, with those crew member, got ashore, that the odds were against us in getting them back."[96] The Khmer Rouge did in fact transfer the crew to mainland Cambodia; however, they released them before first helicopter ever landed at Koh Tang Island.

Intelligence is critical to foreign operations as they often occur at great distances from the leadership in Washington, D.C. In the case of the *Mayaguez*, though the technology for intelligence was there, the outputs from that community were not routed through the proper channels. The military force obtained photos only seconds before takeoff and was unable to use the information given effectively. According to Bob Blough, the intelligence personnel assigned to the assault force were from the B-52 community—strategically focused rather than tactically oriented —and incapable of using the technology to their advantage. The photos and information required for a helicopter pilot flying below 5,000 feet was dramatically different than that of a B-52 pilot flying at 35,000 feet. Technology was not only a critical factor for the operating forces, but also for the president.

President Ford's ability to bypass the organization and reach directly to the operating core was directly enabled by technology. Through the radio connection established in the NMCC (National Military Command Center), he spoke directly several times to fighter pilots and the Airborne Command and Control Center during the strafing of the Cambodian waters. It is also likely that if the radio frequencies of

95 Borer, Douglas. The Clock is Ticking in Iraq, *San Francisco Chronicle,* October 7, 2005

96 Rowan, *Four Days of Mayaguez*, 143.

the assault force were known by the NMCC, he would have attempted contact with those participants as well. Though this seems advantageous, it is actually destructive in established divisionalized structures. The strategic apex should not have direct contact with the operating core as the apex lacks both the situational awareness and knowledge required for controlling the core's outputs. The middle line is critical to military operations, particularly in complex environments such as the *Mayaguez* incident. President Ford, eager to speak directly to the troops, completely changed the organizational structure and technology was the enabler.

Advancement of technology, while required and necessary, must be appreciated in the context in which it is used. Though President Ford's direct discussion with the troops seems an obvious mistake in the *Mayaguez* incident, it is unfortunately still common in today's military. In Robert's Ridge, for example, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld spoke directly to the MH-47 pilots executing an operation under fire in Afghanistan (personal interview with a participating MH-47 pilot, Captain Al Mack, USA, conducted May 2003), overriding the orders upon which the mission was executed. In fact, the orders were changing as the mission progressed and Secretary Rumsfeld directed the situation. The already dire situation was further complicated and the end result was unnecessary loss of life. Whether attributable in part or directly, the technology meant to provide perspective to the senior staff was causal to the accident because of misapplication by the strategic apex.

Time and technology, both outlying but influential factors in the *Mayaguez* incident, added to the complex environment. President Ford, unable to successfully navigate the complex environment, made decisions to execute based on incomplete and sometimes inaccurate information. Had the president not isolated himself as the single actor in the strategic apex, he may have found the complex environment more simple and straightforward. The frames of reference through which he attempted decision making were unfinished and often erroneous perspectives that limited his ability to execute effective action. Application of organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident demonstrates the decision processes at the executive level left the military operation vulnerable to failure despite perceived public success.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

VI.   IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY AND CONCLUSION

Much can be learned from the *Mayaguez* incident using organizational theory as an analytical tool. The *Mayaguez* crisis was rife with potential pitfalls and though President Ford was equipped with an excellent organization of intelligent, competent personnel, the result was unnecessary loss of life. Sacrificing 41 military personnel for the recovery of 39 crewmembers is a major statement in terms of political and military objectives, despite the military responsibility of defending American lives no matter the cost. To the public, the operation was a success and President Ford the savior of the *Mayaguez* crew. To the military, the operation was an embarrassment of windfall proportions. What had begun as a major air assault operation had turned into a quest for survival—all because of failures within the organizational structure and poor decisions made through inappropriate or incomplete frames of reference. The magnitude of irony in the operation is unprecedented—even before the first shot was fired on the island of Koh Tang, the SS *Mayaguez* and her crew had been released. Had President Ford understood or applied even a single concept of organizational theory in his analysis of the situation, it would have provided the necessary perspective for critical decision making, saved lost lives, and prevented men being left behind.

A.   IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Two areas of future study would enhance the proposal that application of the concepts within organizational theory serve to enhance analysis of lessons learned, specifically in the military or governmental environment. The first is to scrutinize the way in which information is gathered and analyzed for lessons learned. Contact with Joint Center for Operational Analysis to understand their process should be the starting point for further examination. The second area of future study is the development of a "tool" (e.g., checklist, flow diagram) for organizations to analyze their output and coordination mechanisms as well as structure. These two areas of study would greatly enhance the accuracy of lessons learned for organizations.

Proposal 1: Further examination of how lessons learned are analyzed is required to improve the resultant solutions.

The *Mayaguez* incident, while a single operation in the military's history, is stereotypical of how many operations occur. Because there is a predictable way military operations occur, there must be a way to alter or improve their actions. Yet the military has repeated the mistakes not only in the *Mayaguez* but also in operations prior to and after the *Mayaguez* incident, despite an entire center for lessons learned being established at the United States Joint Forces Command in Norfolk, Virginia. Named the Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA), it exists to produce "compelling recommendations to change derived from direct observations and sound analysis of current joint operations, exercises and experiments."[97] It also maintains a "comprehensive database and archives of lessons and documents pertaining to previous and ongoing joint operations around the world." The irony is that the center was established in 1997—far too late when one considers the number of U.S. Military operations executed in the twentieth century. Better late than never, the center seeks to unify lessons learned across all services; unfortunately joint lessons are rarely analyzed outside of military channels.

"Failure to consciously define the problem in more ways that one" can lead to "undue influence by the frames of others."[98] Once again, the organization (the military in this case) views the problems through like-minded frames leading to erroneous or incomplete assumptions or actions. "Establishing the framework within which issues will be viewed and decided is often tantamount to determining the result."[99] Therefore, the resultant analysis is incomplete or inaccurate. Not only are the frames through which the analysts at JCOA view an operation limited, but the analysis itself is faulty. According to the website, JCOA gathers lessons learned from inputs entered by military members in the field. The center then repeats the mistakes and lessons learned in a war-gaming drill

---

[97] United States Joint Forces Command. *Joint Center for Operational Analysis.* http://www.jfcom.mil/about/fact_jcoa.htm.

[98] Russo and Schoemaker. *Decision Traps*, 39.

[99] Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Managing with Power*, 203.

to produce a solution to the problem submitted. By using only single-source analysis, JCOA is limiting the military's possibilities for success, making them vulnerable to continued failure.

This thesis, by using concepts outside of the typical military war-game analysis, seeks to demonstrate the effectiveness of alternate analytical methods. Though organizational theory is more commonly associated with businesses, it has direct application to the military and government structures. In the case of the *Mayaguez*, an entirely different perspective of failure was achieved by exposing the president as the single-actor strategic apex. Though the president did not fail the operation, his decision making exposed the military to unnecessary risk. If one read only the GAO reports, it would be determined the military and in no way, the president, was entirely at fault for the mistakes committed.

War-gaming could include frames of reference as part of the final analysis. When used repetitively, it becomes second nature to view the events through different lenses, therefore allowing diverse analyses of the same experience, allowing for a shared understanding in a dynamic world. Organizational theory is not necessarily the answer, but it exemplifies the need to apply theories outside of typical military thought to expose the true problems and lessons learned in military operations.

Proposal 2: An organizational theory tool may be effective in alternative analysis of military lessons learned.

As exemplified by JCOA, the military lacks effective tools to properly analyze lessons learned. Instead, the lessons gathered through an online process are consolidated, reviewed, and then modeled by a war-game scenario. The center personnel design the game to simulate the same situation the forces were in, and then merely re-enact the event applying the lessons learned to "analyze" whether they are credible solutions. Though re-enacting the scenario with new material is somewhat effective, it hardly gains much more than a hindsight discussion. Again, the concern is the frame of reference through which the analysts examine the event *and the organization*. Unfortunately, the organization is

rarely analyzed by any perspective other than the war-game. This thesis exemplifies the value of applying other academic theories when analyzing both organizations and events. Again, if frames of reference are incorporated, a shared understanding may result.

Though commanders often are laden with techniques, advice, and theories to take to battle, an organizational theory tool to use on the lessons learned may prove effective. Though it is not feasible in the heat of battle to pull out a checklist for analysis, it may be valuable in post-battle discussions. More importantly, JCOA would greatly benefit from the ability to apply theory rather than simulation or modeling to lessons learned. Varying theoretical perspectives serve to expand knowledge by providing different, even opposing views. As demonstrated in this thesis, application of organizational theory exposed organizational failures in the *Mayaguez* incident rather than simple lessons learned as published in the GAO analysis.

B. CONCLUSION

Applying selected concepts of organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident of 1975 leads to a more comprehensive understanding of events and more accurate lessons learned. Application of organizational theory to the *Mayaguez* incident demonstrates the decision processes at the executive level left the military operation vulnerable to failure. The *Mayaguez* crisis was rife with potential pitfalls and though President Ford was equipped with an excellent organization of intelligent, competent personnel, the result was unnecessary loss of life. Publicly, the operation was a success, however, to the military the operation was an embarrassment—all because of failures within the organizational structure and poor decision making. Application of the concepts within organizational theory facilitate comprehensive analysis rather than elementary lessons learned.

Future study should include both examination of the current process for collecting, analyzing, and publishing lessons learned as well as creation of a tool organizational leadership can use to analyze their processes, outputs, and design. It should be noted other organizational theorists suggest that while organizations can improve their processes and outputs, the improvement is often limited because the

organization itself is resistant to change. Amy Zegart, in *Flawed by Design*, suggests, "Once [government agencies] arise, they become very difficult to change."[100] She observes that "the price of initial structural choices appears to be high . . . and [organizations] are created by political actors who must operate in a reality suffused with conflict, contention, and compromise…"[101] Though the theory challenges other theories that suggest organizations can change, it is also directly in line with the theory examined in this thesis—Bolman and Deal's framing theory. Regardless of the organizational theory, this thesis suggests application of *any* theory during analysis will prove more productive than current practices in governmental organizations.

---

[100] Zegart, Amy B. *Flawed by Design.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, 5.

[101] Ibid., 53.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

APPENDIX A

LOCATION OF THE SS *MAYAGUEZ* AND AREA OF OPERATIONS

WHEREABOUTS OF MAYAGUEZ AND CREW
MAY 12-15, 1975
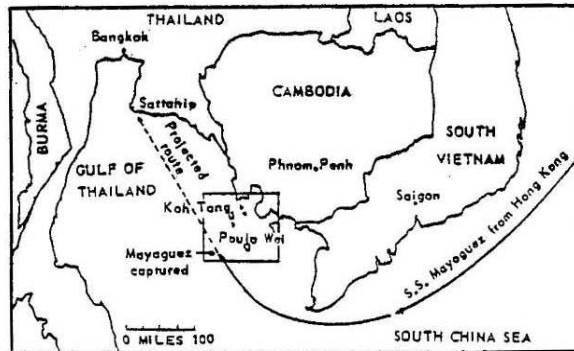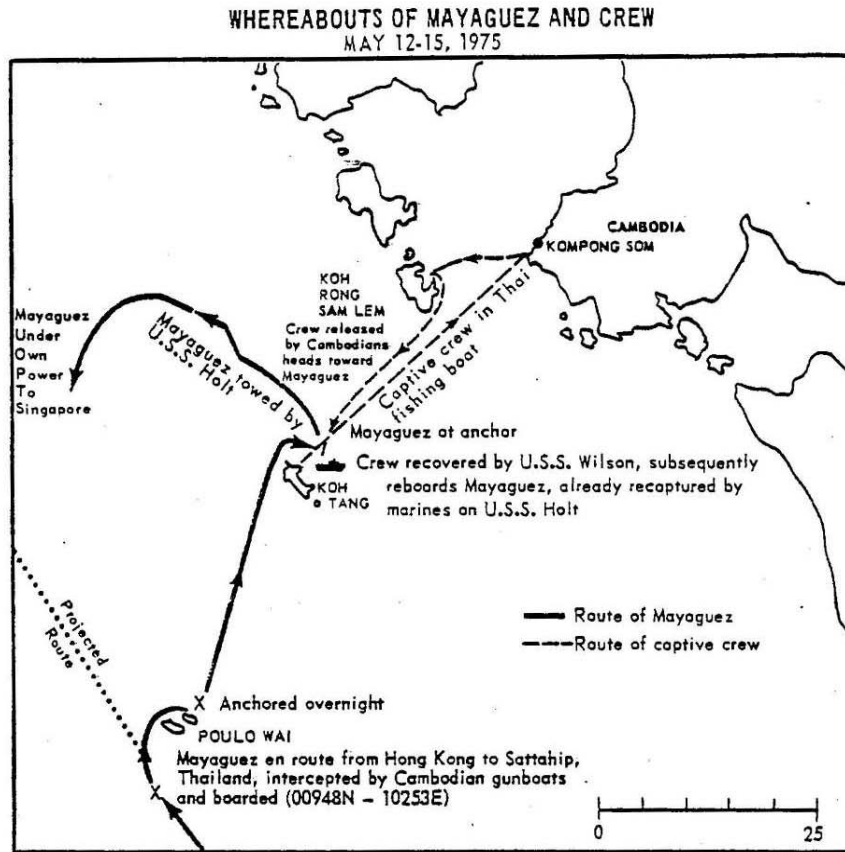
THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

APPENDIX B

MAYAGUEZ TIMELINE

APPENDIX

———

DEPARTMENT OF STATE CHRONOLOGY OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT

(ALL TIMES ARE EASTERN DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME)

May 12

3:18 a.m.—Mr. John Neal of the Delta Exploration Co. in Jakarta, Indonesia received a Mayday call from the *Mayaguez*. Messages stated "Have been fired upon and boarded by Cambodian armed forces at 9 degrees 48 minutes north/102 degrees 52 minutes east. Ship is being towed to unknown Cambodian port."

4:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m.—Mr. Neal lost communication with the ship, gave up trying to reach the ship and informed the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta of the incident.

5:02 a.m.—U.S. Embassy in Jakarta informed Washington of the incident.

7:30 a.m.—Pentagon orders CINCPAC to send reconnaissance aircraft to find ship.

9:57 a.m.—U.S. reconnaissance aircraft were dispatched to the area to attempt to locate the ship and verify the report.

12:05 p.m.—The President chaired a meeting of the National Security Council.

1:50 p.m.—White House press briefing and statement concerning seizure of the ship and U.S. demands for its release.

4:30 p.m.—A representative of the Liaison Office of the People's Republic of China summoned to the State Department was given a message for the Cambodian authorities, demanding the release of the ship. The PRC representative refused to accept the message.

9:16 p.m.—U.S. reconnaissance aircraft made a positive identification of the ship and observed it being escorted by Cambodian gunboats. The aircraft was fired at and hit, sustaining minor damage.

May 13

12:10 a.m.—A representative of the United States Liaison Office in Peking delivered a message to the Cambodian Embassy there. A message was also delivered to the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China.

1:25 a.m.—U.S. reconnaissance aircraft observed the *Mayaguez* anchoring one nautical mile north of Koh Tang Island. The aircraft was fired at but not hit.

6:04 a.m.—The *Mayaguez* crew was observed being transferred from the ship.

6:18 a.m.—The Pentagon ordered the Air Force to maintain surveillance of the *Mayaguez* and prevent its movement into port on the Cambodian mainland. Warning shots were fired across bow of *Mayaguez* to signal it not to move. Specific orders were given not to attack the Cambodian gunboats.

6:54 a.m.—White House press briefing on location of ship and U.S. surveillance effort.

7:35 a.m.—The crew is observed on the island but it cannot be ascertained how many men have been moved. Therefore, it is not certain that the entire crew has left the ship.

3:05 p.m.—A C-130 aircraft received small arms fire from the island.

3:20 p.m.—Four Cambodian gunboats at island fired anti-aircraft weapons at C-130.

5:50 p.m. to 6:35 p.m.—Congressional leadership contacted by telephone and advised that President had directed military actions to prevent the *Mayaguez* and its crew from being transferred to the Cambodian mainland and to prevent reinforcement from the mainland of Cambodian forces detaining the *Mayaguez* vessel and crew.

7:04 p.m.—Three patrol boats move from the island. Warning fire from USAF planes turns them back to Koh Tang.

9:43 p.m.—Cambodian patrol boat ignores warning fire from U.S. aircraft and continues to move. Boat is attacked and set afire.

9:52 p.m.—Patrol boat spotted with possible crew members on it. U.S. aircraft fires in front of it in order to turn it back. Boat continues to move toward the mainland.

10:03 p.m.—A different patrol boat moves and is engaged and set afire by air strikes.

10:40 p.m.—The President chaired a meeting of the National Security Council.

11:00 p.m.—The vessel believed to be carrying crew members reaches the mainland.

May 14

12:29 a.m.—Three other patrol boats are engaged by U.S. aircraft. One is sunk, other two damaged. A subsequent strike damages two other patrol boats.

7:15 a.m.—U.S. Liaison Office in Peking reported that PRC Foreign Ministry returned the message for the Cambodian authorities.

11:00 a.m.—USS *Harold E. Holt* arrives in the area.

11:00 a.m.—Congressional leadership notified by telephone that three Cambodian boats had been sunk and four damaged by U.S. air strikes.

11:50 a.m.—DOD press briefing and statement about U.S. attacks on Cambodian boats.

1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.—A letter regarding this action was delivered to UN Secretary General Waldheim by Ambassador Scali, requesting UN Secretary General to take any steps in his ability to secure safe return of *Mayaguez* and crew.

3:00 to 5:00 p.m.—State Department officials briefed members of the House International Relations Committee, Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Armed Services Committee.

3:52 p.m.—President chairs NSC meeting in the Cabinet Room.

4:45 p.m. to 5:10 p.m.—Orders are issued to begin the military operations for the recovery of the SS *Mayaguez* and crew including air attacks against military facilities near Kompong Som to prevent reinforcement and support from the mainland for Cambodian forces detaining the ship and its crew.

5:14 p.m. to 5:20 p.m.—U.S. assault forces take off from stations.

6:40 p.m. to 7:40 p.m.—President meets with Congressional leadership to inform them of the actions he has ordered to recover the ship and the crew.

7:00 p.m.—Marine assault force arrives at USS *Holt*.

7:07 p.m.—Phnom Penh domestic radio service carries a broadcast in Cambodian that states that the Cambodian Government will order the *Mayaguez* to withdraw from Cambodian territorial waters. No mention is made of the crew.

7:09 p.m.—Assault force arrives at Koh Tang Island and comes under fire.

7:15 p.m.—A helicopter in the assault force against Koh Tang Island is hit and downed.

7:45 p.m.—Another helicopter crashes on the island.

7:46 p.m.—Approximately 100 Marines are on Koh Tang Island.

8:06 p.m.—The Cambodian broadcast, monitored by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service and translated into English, was carried on the FBIS wire.

8:15 p.m.—Insertion of the first assault wave on Koh Tang Island was completed, 135 Marines now on beach.

8:15 p.m.—The President is informed of the FBIS wire report by Secretary Kissinger.

8:30 p.m.—White House press briefing and statement on the actions ordered by the President.

8:45 p.m.—Support aircraft arrive and commence operations against military installations near Kompong Som.

9:05 p.m.—Marines from the USS *Holt* board and take control of the SS *Mayaguez*. They find evidence that the vessel had been occupied until just before their arrival.

66

9:15 p.m.—White House issued press release on message being sent to Cambodian authorities offering to stop military operations if crew is released.

9:33 p.m.—*Mayaguez* is secured and U.S. colors are raised.

10:23 p.m.—A boat was reported near Koh Tang Island flying a white flag.

11:07 p.m.—The USS *Wilson* takes aboard the occupants of that boat. The occupants were determined to be the entire crew of the SS *Mayaguez*.

11:16 p.m.—The order was given to cease all offensive operations and begin to withdraw. The Commander of the forces on the island requests additional ground forces to provide security for a successful withdrawal.

11:31 p.m.—White House statement on recovery of ship.

11:45 p.m.—The additional ground security forces arrive at Koh Tang Island.

May 15

12:10 a.m.—Airstrikes at Kompong Som terminate.

12:25 a.m.—The *Mayaguez* crew is returned to its vessel.

12:30 a.m.—The President's statement on recovery of ship and crew.

12:45 a.m.—DOD press briefing on military actions.

1:21 a.m.—A helicopter is hit during effort to remove troops from the island.

2:00 a.m. to 2:30 a.m.—A report consistent with the War Powers Resolution from the President was transmitted to Speaker of the House and to President Pro Tempore of the Senate.

4:40 a.m.—*Mayaguez* underway.

6:15 a.m.—Commencement of operation to evacuate last elements of marines on Koh Tang Island using helicopters and USS *Wilson* and USS *Holt*.

7:17 a.m.—Final extraction of U.S. ground forces completed.

12:21 p.m.—Last aircraft departed the area.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

APPENDIX C

PICTORAL REPRESENTION OF TIMELINE

Map 4 — Plan of Attack and Enemy Order of Battle

Koh Tang Khymer Rouge Dispositions, First Light, 15 May

Map 6 — The Approach to Koh Tang 0600, 15 May

Map 7 — Koh Tang Situation about 0700

Koh Tang
Situation Shortly after 1000

Following Insertion by
Jolly Green 41

G [X] 2/9 (-)
First Lieutenant Keith
about 70-90 Effectives*

60 Marines
5 Air Force

Aborted Extraction Attempt by Jolly
Green 13 at 0930, Followed by A-7
Directed Air Strikes in Vicinity

Sunken Swift Boat
with Decks Awash

Legend

Khmer Krahan
Dispositions

Marine Dispositions

Spectre Fire Mission

* Total of 82 inserted less wounded
and 1-4 killed in action

Probable Deployment o
Khmer Krahan reserve‡

Moving North
Along Shore

Command Element
and Mortar Section [X] 2/9
Lieutenant Colonel Austin
29 men

Yards
0 100   500   1000
0 100   500   1 Kilometer
Meters

Map 8

Koh Tang
Situation, 1330-1600

After Insertions by Knife 32,
Jolly Green 42, and Jolly
Green 43

Engaged by
Direct Fire

Root Used as
Reference Point

USS Henry B. Wilson's Track along
the Approximate 6 Fathom Line

Targets Engaged
Under A-7 Control**

Unsuccessful Extraction
Attempt by Jolly Green 41,
1430-25

G [ ] 2/9 (-)
Lieutenant Colonel Austin
Approximately 200 Effectives*

Legend

Khmer Krahan
Dispositions

Marine Dispositions

Gun Positions
Engaged by Henry B.
Wilson

* C Company blue elements of E Company. A total of
21 men of BLT 2/9 were inserted on the west side of
the island. Nine wounded were evacuated by second-
wave helicopters, one was KIA, three were MIA, and
others were wounded in the course of the afternoon.
** Numerous targets engaged in this area and around
the east beach; those indicated were formally credited
as destroyed.

Yards
0 100   500   1000
0 100   500   1 Kilometer
Meters

Map 9

Koh Tang
Situation, 1820

Following Extraction of the
Marine/Air Force Group from
the East Beach

Henry B. Wilson's Track along the
Approximate 6 Fathom Line

Extracted by Jolly Green 11,
1820-23

Wilson's Gig Proceeding
to West Side of Island

G [X] 2/9 (-)
Lieutenant Colonel Austin
About 200 effectives*

Destroyed by 5-inch Fire
from Wilson 1530-34

Legend

Khmer Krahan
Dispositions

Marine Dispositions

* A total of 212 marines and navy
medical personnel were inserted on
the west side of the island. Of
these, 11 were medevaced by
second-wave helicopters and three
were eventually declared missing in
action.

** As reported to ABCCC by the
drop aircraft, generally
corroborated by observers on
Wilson's bridge.

BLU-82 Drop
Coordinates**

Yards
0 100   500   1000
0 100   500   1 Kilometer
Meters

Map 10

Koh Tang
Extraction Operations, 1844-2010

Sizes and Locations of
Ships Not to Scale

K 51
JG 43

c. 1945
1719

Coral Sea

**Extraction
Timeline**
Local Times Gulf of Siam

Rescue of Isolated Group
on East Beach; Damage to
Jolly Green 11 and 12

1822 Sunset

Legend

Khmer Krahan
Dispositions

Marine Perimeter at
onset of Extraction

Final Perimeter

Time spent in LZ by
Helicopter

K 51
JG 43   1844 Civil Twilight
JG 44

1910 Nautical Twilight

Bob   JG 44

K 51

LZ

2010 ABCCC Releases
Helicopters from Orbit

Yards
0 100   500   1000
0 100   500   1 Kilometer
Meters

Map 11

APPENDIX D

GAO ANALYSIS

CHAPTER 7.—AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR ANALYSIS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

State did not challenge the facts in our report. However, in transmitting the Department's comments, the Deputy Under Secretary for Management expressed his personal view (see app. III) that the report was inadequate and misleading and that it attempted to second-guess the actions of officials acting under the constraints of time. He cited as an example of "weakness" in our reporting, that we ignored public statements of the Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Affairs.[1]

In drafting our report we very carefully reconstructed what factual information existed during the various stages of the incident. Care was taken not to introduce data which was out of the sequence of events and to weigh closely information which became available after the incident. For this reason, we purposely did not give much credence to the statements of the Deputy Premier of Cambodia which were made in September 1975, almost 4 months after the incident. Actually, the full September statements indicate that the seizure of the *Mayaguez* was initiated by a local commander, that authorities in Phnom Penh learned of it many hours later, and that poor communications between Phnom Penh and local authorities delayed the Cambodian response. Thus, these statements hardly support a view that expeditious military action was necessary to secure the release of the *Mayaguez* and its crew.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Defense did not question the accuracy of our report but rather, in a few instances, our interpretation of the facts.

Defense maintained that "the report insists that the whereabouts of the crew could and should have been more accurately ascertained." This statement does not accurately reflect our position. Our report points out that additional assets were available to attempt to obtain better information but that these assets were not used. Defense agreed the use of these assets might have provided additional data during the incident. We pointed out that details as to the basis for suspecting caucasians had been moved to the mainland never reached the military command centers. These details lend credence to an interpretation that

---

[1] Actually the statements referred to were made by the Deputy Premier of Cambodia.

71

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

APPENDIX E

NSC MEETING MINUTES

3539

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE

MINUTES

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

Date:	Tuesday, May 13, 1975
Time:	10:40 p.m. to 12:25 a.m.
Place:	Cabinet Room, the White House
Subject:	Seizure of American Ship by Cambodian Authorities

Principals

The President
The Vice President
Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger
Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger
Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. David C. Jones
Director of Central Intelligence William Colby

Other Attendees

State: Deputy Secretary of State Robert Ingersoll

DOD: Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements

WH: Donald Rumsfeld
John Marsh
Robert Hartmann
Philip Buchen

NSC: Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft
W. Richard Smyser

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President: Brent, can you tell us what the situation is?

Scowcroft: With regard to the boat that I told you about, we do not have much time. Our aircraft has used riot control agents twice. That has delayed the boat but it has not stopped it. It is now about six miles from Kompong Som, according to the pilot. The pilot is not at all sure that he can disable the boat without sinking it.

President: I thought the first boat had reached the shore.

Schlesinger: It got to the island.

Jones: It was in range.

President: I understand we sank the second one. And the third one is the one we are now talking about.

Scowcroft: That is correct. That boat is now six miles from Kompong Som.

President: Did the pilot try riot control agents?

Scowcroft: They were tried and they did not work. Now the pilot is not sure what to do next.

Schlesinger: He is not certain that there are Caucasians on board.

President: Let's look at it. If they got to shore, and we have done the other things we are contemplating, there will not be much opportunity for them anyway.

Kissinger: They will hold them for bargaining.

Hartmann: How can the pilot tell whether the men are Caucasians?

Schlesinger: By a number of signs, such as their size and the color of their skin.

Scowcroft: It is not an easy identification. It is very tough.

Schlesinger: I would think that avoiding bargaining chips is less of an objective than not being in a position where the Cambodians can say that the F-4's killed our own men.

TOP SECRET /SENSITIVE   - XGDS

President: What do we do? Should we let them go into port?

Schlesinger: Let's continue to try to stop them with riot control agents.
                We understand there are 8 to 9 men on board who seem to
                be Americans. There are others below who may be
                Americans. The pilot thinks there may be more Americans.

President: What do you recommend?

Schlesinger: I recommend we sink the speedboats. I do not think we should
                sink the other boat but should rather continue to use the riot
                control agents.

Scowcroft: The pilot is reluctant to attack if he is under instructions not
                to sink the boat.

Schlesinger: That is true. He originally thought that he could disable the
                boat without sinking it. Then he became reluctant.

President: What do you think?

Kissinger: I have just come back into this problem, having been out of
                town all day. My instinct would have been as follows:

                We have two problems:

                -- First, the problem of the crew and the ship and of how we
                win their release.

                -- Second, our general posture which goes beyond the crew
                and the ship.

                But that sort of thing comes later.

                In the immediate situation, I think I agree with Jim. We will
                take a beating if we kill the Americans. At the same time,
                we must understand that we cannot negotiate for them once
                they are on the mainland. If you are willing to take that
                position, then I think we can let them go. We should not let
                them become bargaining chips.

Scowcroft: We have already done it on one.

Schlesinger:	There were no Caucasians on it.
Kissinger:	We have a pilot who thinks there may be Caucasians. It would have been a much better position for us to take that we will simply hit anything that leaves the island.
President:	Right.
Kissinger:	Now we are debating with the pilot.
President:	I gave the order at the meeting to stop all boats. I cannot understand what happened on that order, because I heard that it did not go out until 3:30
Schlesinger:	It went out by telephone within half an hour after you gave it.
Jones:	We talked to Burns, the Commander out there, immediately. The confirming order went out later. But our communications are so good that we can get all the information back here immediately to Washington in order to make the decisions from here.
President:	Was the order given, and at what time, not to permit any boats to leave the island or come into it? I was told it was not given until 3:30. That is inexcusable.
Jones:	That was the written order, not the verbal order.
President:	Let's find out when it was given.
Clements:	To assist General Jones, I was with him in the Situation Room when he gave the order even before he left the White House.
President:	Let's find out what happened. It is inexcusable to have such a delay.

Now let us talk about the problem of the moment. It is a different situation, and I reluctantly agree with Jim and Henry. |

TOP SECRET /SENSITIVE - XGDS

Schlesinger:	I think we should destroy the boats that still remain at the island.
President:	That is your recommendation. What do you think, Henry?
Kissinger:	I'm afraid that if we do a few little steps every few hours, we are in trouble. I think we should go ahead with the island, Kompong Som, and the ship all at once. I think people should have the impression that we are potentially trigger-happy. I think that once we have our destroyer on station, that is ideal.
Schlesinger:	I agree. It will go in at noon.
Kissinger:	In the meantime, I think we should sink the boats that are at the island.
Rumsfeld:	I thought the HOLT would get in at 8:00 a.m.
Schlesinger:	We understand it is doing 21 knots, not 25.
Scowcroft:	I have got to get the word out. What should I tell them?
President:	Tell them to sink the boats near the island. On the other boat, use riot control agents or other methods, but do not attack it.
Marsh:	Supposing the boats near the island have Americans on it. Should we send some order to use only riot control agents there?
Kissinger:	I think the pilot should sink them. He should destroy the boats and not send situation reports.
President:	On one boat, there is a possibility of Caucasians. On the others, we can't be sure.
Jones:	Suppose we say in our order that they should hit all the boats in the cove, not just two.
Kissinger:	We don't need to decide on the cove right now. We have some time.

President:	Is it 11:00 o"clock there now?
Schlesinger:	It is 10:00 o"clock.
President:	How many hours away is the HOLT?
Kissinger:	Fourteen hours.

Jones: (Raising a chart) I have tried to put all this in a chart, indicating when the key actions would take place. The HOLT, we expect, will arrive at 12:30 Washington time tomorrow. The CORAL SEA and the HANCOCK will arrive later. We are not sure of the latter's arrival time because it is having trouble with one propeller shaft.

The Marines are all airborne. They are on the way to Utapao. That is the 1,000 Marines. The 150, with their helicopters, are already there and on the alert. The 1,000 Marines will arrive around 0300 tomorrow morning. That is the time for the first one. After that the others arrive every few hours.

President: Then the HOLT arrives at 11:30 Eastern Daylight time tomorrow. That is 2330 Cambodia time.

And the CORAL SEA about 28 hours from now.

Jones: It is making 25 knots. The plots are pretty good. It is moving towards the spot.

President: That is not flank speed.

Jones: That is the best time that they can do.

President: Flank speed is 33 knots.

Jones: The Navy says that that is the best time that they can make.

Rumsfeld: The information this afternoon was that the HANCOCK would arrive on Friday.

Jones: This is very tenuous. They are working on one of the shafts.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Rumsfeld:	That is 2200, Friday, the 16th?
Jones:	No, the 15th.
Schlesinger:	We are in serious trouble on the mechanical side. One shaft is out on the HANCOCK. The OKINAWA has an oiler out. It is making only 10 knots. There has been a series of mishaps.
President:	What can be done before daylight ends over there today?
Schlesinger:	We have 11 choppers at Utapao. We can run operations against the vessel. In addition, we can land on the island with 120 Marines. We can support that with the force from Okinawa. All together, we would have 270 Marines. In all probability, we could take the island. The Marines estimate that there might be about 100 Cambodians on the island. We would prefer to land with 1,000.
President:	If you do not do it during this daylight, you have a delay. How long would it be?
Schlesinger:	24 hours. We do not have the HOLT there yet. The HOLT will arrive at noon tomorrow our time. If it is to do anything, I would prefer to wait until the first light on the 15th. Until the CORAL SEA arrives, all we can use are the helicopters at Utapao.
Kissinger:	How would the Marines get down?
Jones:	On ladders.
Schlesinger:	The helicopters would hover.
Kissinger:	But if there are 100 troops on the island, why do we not attack it?
President:	In this daylight cycle, you could put 120 on the ships, and 270 on the island?
Jones:	The total lift is 270. Our plan was to seize the ship with 120, and then to use the Marines from Okinawa to try to go on the island.

TOP-SECRET /SENSITIVE - XGDS

It is hazardous to go onto the island with this first group because you do not have time to recycle. We would have to let them remain there overnight, against a force that we do not know.

Kissinger: Does the CORAL SEA have helicopters?

Jones: No. It has only two or so that it uses itself. But we could take the Marines on to the CORAL SEA, and thus get them close to the island.

Kissinger: I understand we only have 11 choppers.

Colby: Couldn't the 270 protect themselves against the force on the island?

Jones: We have nothing to confirm the exact force on that island.

Kissinger: I do not see what we gain by going on with that force tonight. If you sink the boats in the area, and all who approach, it does not matter if we have anybody else on the island. At that point, nothing will be moving.

My instinct would be to wait for the HOLT and the CORAL SEA. You can then work with the Marines from the CORAL SEA. Nothing can happen in the meantime. Then I would assemble a force and really move vigorously.

President: In other words, the time you gain in this cycle is not worth the gamble.

Kissinger: Later you can do more. It might work with the 270. But it is a risk. It should be decisive and it should look powerful.

Jones: But it cannot be in 24 hours, only in 48. Once you start cycling, it takes time.

Schlesinger: I think that Henry (Kissinger) is thinking of going tomorrow night.

Rumsfeld: But you have only a few hours left of daylight.

Jones: That would not be enough.

Schlesinger: We need the morning of the 16th for a coordinated assault.

Kissinger: We are talking about 48 hours.

President: In other words, you are talking about Thursday night our time.

Jones: On Wednesday night, the CORAL SEA will help a little with its fighters. But not with Marines. Maybe the HANCOCK will do it.

Kissinger: You also have the HOLT.

Jones: With the CORAL SEA, you have other vessels as well. You will have a total of five ships. You would have a good force, but it is very late at night to begin to cycle the Marines.

Colby: Our estimate was that there were 2,000 in Kompong Som. There is not a large force on the island.

President: Do you think we can figure with 100?

Colby: Yes. The KC have just arrived in power. They have probably not had time to man the island more fully.

Clements: In the time frame that you are talking about, there will not be an island worth taking. All the Americans will be gone.

President: Not if we knock out the boats. Unless, of course, they leave at night.

Clements: Right. I think they will get out. The HOLT will protect the ship. But that is not what matters. I doubt that there will be anything on the island.

Rumsfeld: Can we not use flares for this?

Jones: The main thing we use at night is infra-red. We can read it at night. The P-3's also have searchlights and flares.

TOP SECRET /SENSITIVE - XGDS

Rumsfeld:	The P-3's should be good at keeping the boat under control.
Jones:	Yes, unless the weather is bad.
Clements:	The small boats can get through. You cannot get control.
Colby:	The KC may say something soon.
President:	It seems that at a minimum we should wait for the next daylight cycle, with the HOLT getting there.
Kissinger:	The HOLT will be there then.
President:	Right. Is it the unanimous view that we should withhold action until after the CORAL SEA has a full day there?
Schlesinger:	I think you should wait.
Colby:	This is not my business. I do not think you should go tonight. But I worry about what might happen later. If they get locked in, if they take reprisals, it would be very difficult for us.
Clements:	I would like to take a middle position. Once the HOLT gets there, we will have some control. We can do a great deal.
Colby:	I think that with the Marines, you have to go soon.
Kissinger:	I am very leery about that operation using ladders.
Schlesinger:	If there is token resistance on the island, the Marines can handle it. If there is more, they can try to lock in and get more Marines to land the next day, with the HOLT for additional support. It is a close call. There are the pressures of time. It is also possible that the Cambodians will decide to execute our men.
Colby:	Once we take that ship, the clock is ticking.

TOP SEGRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Clements: The HOLT can get them, by speaking to them with loud-
                 speakers. It can let them know our position.

Kissinger: But that is not the issue. We should not look as though people
                 can localize an issue. We have to use the opportunity to
                 prove that others will be worse off if they tackle us, and not
                 that they can return to the status quo.

                 It is not just enough to get the ship's release. Using one
                 aircraft carrier, one destroyer, and 1,000 Marines to get
                 the ship out is not much. I think we should seize the island,
                 seize the ship, and hit the mainland. I am thinking not of
                 Cambodia, but of Korea and of the Soviet Union and of others.
                 It will not help you with the Congress if they get the wrong
                 impression of the way we will act under such circumstances.

                 As for the 270 Marines, it had several components. There is
                 an advantage in speed. The problem is if anything goes wrong,
                 as often does. I think against 100 KC you would lose more
                 Americans because you do not have overwhelming power. I
                 am assuming we will not negotiate. We must have an uncon-
                 ditional release. On balance, I would like to get a more
                 reliable force.

Clements: If you want the ship and the Americans, why not let the HOLT
                 do it? Let the HOLT broadcast that if the Americans are not
                 released, all hell will break loose.

Kissinger: What would hell mean in a case like that?

President: Let's do an add-on to Colby's suggestion. The HOLT is there.
                 You land 270 Marines. You bomb the airport at Sihanoukville.

Colby: My schedule is to land the Marines today.

Schlesinger: Until the CORAL SEA gets there, we have only the aircraft
                 from Thailand. The inhibitions on the use of the aircraft from
                 Thailand are greater.

President: No, you have the B-52's on Guam. They can be used.

Colby: If you knock out every boat, you have effectiveness.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Kissinger:	That is still localizing it. We will not get that many chances.
	As Jim says, it would exacerbate the Thai problem.
President:	If we order the Marines to go from Utapao, we could get 270 in there.
Jones:	That was before we lost two helicopters on SAR. I would urge against going this daylight. The Marines would just be landing at Utapao. The helicopter pilots would be tired. Nobody would be mated up yet. It would be a difficult operation to be launching at that time, especially since we could not follow up the same day.
Kissinger:	If you were to give the orders now, Mr. President, there would still be some hours of delay before the messages were received and before the preparations were made. By then we would really only have three more hours of daylight left in order to conduct the operation.
President:	So we rule out any action on this daylight cycle. Then, on the next day, the HOLT gets there. We then have some more options. The CORAL SEA, however, doesn't get there until the next cycle.
Kissinger:	If you wait 24 more hours, you have the HOLT and you also have the fact that you can use 270 Marines.
Jones:	And, in fact, you have 250 more than you can put in. You also have the CORAL SEA.
Kissinger:	I am not sure that I would let the HOLT go up against the vessel. It may be best to keep the HOLT where it can blockade the island. Then we can seize the island.
Schlesinger:	I agree with Kissinger. But we have to keep in mind that there are forces on the island. That gives them time to prepare. It also gives them time to scuttle the ship.
Kissinger:	But they can still scuttle the ship, even with the HOLT alongside. If we could seize the ship quickly, I would agree. I did not know that the HOLT could board.
President:	Unless sailors are different now, they are not good boarders.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Schlesinger:	Could any Marines do it?
Jones:	We could get the Marines on the ship, but then we could not use them for other things.
	The suggestion is to go with the first light on the 15th, to get the HOLT and to hold the island.
Kissinger:	My suggestion is to seize the island. We cannot do anything tonight. By tomorrow morning, we can put the Marines on the HOLT. They can operate. I would go for the island at daybreak of the 15th.
Schlesinger:	The problem with that is that the CORAL SEA will not be there. If you want an overwhelming force on the island, you should wait until the 16th.
Kissinger:	The ideal time for what I have in mind is the 16th. That would not just include the island but Kompong Som, the airport and boats.
President:	If you wait until the 16th, you have maximum capability. But the people in Utapao should be prepared to operate as soon as the HOLT gets there, at 11:30 tomorrow night. The Marines should be alerted.
Kissinger:	The HOLT gets there at noon tomorrow. So we can go from first light. We could seize the island and the ship. That, however, would not give us the CORAL SEA for such operations as we would wish to run against Kompong Som.
Schlesinger:	You can get 250 Marines in helicopters.
Colby:	That would mean 500 in two cycles.
President:	The operational orders should be set up so that the HOLT and the Marines can go. We do not know what will happen in 24 hours. They have options also. We can make a decision tomorrow if we want to. But we should have orders ready to go so that they can move within 24 hours. That would be for the HOLT, the Marines, and the B-52's.
Rumsfeld:	When would it start, then?

Kissinger: At 2200 hours tomorrow. I think that when we move, we should
             hit the mainland as well as the island. We should hit targets
             at Kompong Som and the airfield and say that we are doing it
             to suppress any supporting action against our operations to
             regain the ship and seize the island.

             If the B-52's can do it, I would like to do it tomorrow night.
             Forty-eight hours are better militarily. But so much can
             happen, domestically and internationally. We have to be ready
             to take the island and the ship and to hit Kompong Som.

President: I think we should be ready to go in 24 hours. We may, however,
             want to wait.

Schlesinger: We will be prepared to go on the morning of the 15th. We will
             see if we can get the Marines on the HOLT. At first light, we
             will have plans to go to the island. Simultaneously, we will go
             for the ship.

             We will have the B-52's at Guam ready to go for Kompong Som
             But I think there are political advantages to using the aircraft
             from the CORAL SEA. You will have more problems on the
             Hill with the B-52's from Guam.

Vice President: Why?

Schlesinger: The B-52's are a red flag on the Hill. Moreover, they bomb
             a very large box and they are not so accurate. They might
             generate a lot of casualties outside the exact areas that we
             would want to hit.

President: Let's see what the chiefs say is better, the aircraft from the
             carrier or the B-52's. It should be their judgment.

Kissinger: But the CORAL SEA would delay us 24 hours.

Rumsfeld: But do we have to wait for the CORAL SEA actually to arrive?

Scowcroft: No. Their planes can operate at considerable distance.

President: On the 15th, we can use the B-52's from Guam. On the 16th,
             we also have the aircraft from the CORAL SEA.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

Jones: Except, if you use the CORAL SEA, it limits some assets. Everybody is now on alert. We can do it when you say. We are ready to go.

Rumsfeld: Is it not possible that the CORAL SEA aircraft could strike Cambodia even when the CORAL SEA is still hours away?

Schlesinger: I'm not sure it would be close enough. Let me check.

Rumsfeld: The CORAL SEA could be there near that time.

Schlesinger: Let me check.

President: You may have an operational problem. If you have to turn the carrier into the wind in order to dispatch and recover air-craft, you may lose time.

Schlesinger: Yes, but if you go for the 15th, you do not need its presence so soon if you can use the aircraft from a distance.

Kissinger: What do we have on the CORAL SEA?

Jones: We have fighter aircraft, including F-4's and A-7's.

Kissinger: Would they be more accurate than the B-52's?

Jones: Not necessarily. It depends on the type of target.

Buchen: I see two problems:

                 -- The first is Cooper-Church Amendment.

                 -- The second is international law.

President: On international law, I do not think we have a problem. They have clearly violated it.

Buchen: We have the right of self-defense, but only self-defense. The Cooper-Church Amendment says no actions in Indochina.

Kissinger: I think you can legitimately say that our aircraft are suppressing hostile action against our operation.

TOP SECRET /SENSITIVE

President: We cannot be that concerned in this instance.

Marsh: This afternoon, we had the NSC prepare a paper saying what
                  we would do. It showed that you would use force in general
                  terms. The reaction from the people we talked to was very
                  favorable.

Clements: I hate to have us lose sight of our objectives in this case.
                  Those objectives are to get the Americans and the ship. If
                  we want to punish people, that's another thing. I think that
                  dropping a lot of bombs on the mainland will not help us with
                  the release of the Americans.

President: I think we have to assume that the Americans were taken from
                  the island and that some were killed. This is tragic, but I
                  think that we have to assume that it happened. Does anybody
                  disagree?

                  (General expressions of agreement.)

Vice President: At a briefing yesterday, Congressman Zablocki, one of the
                  proponents of the War Powers Act, said that he would tell the
                  press that the U.S. could bomb the hell out of them.

Schlesinger: We are not inhibited by the War Powers Act, only by
                  Cooper-Church.

Colby: We think there are about three T-28's at Kompong Som airfield.
                  They could use them. So there is a potential threat at
                  Kompong Som against our forces.

President: Can we verify this?

Colby: This is from a photograph taken on the 12th.

Rumsfeld: How are those aircrafts equipped?

Colby: With bombs and guns.

Kissinger: I think the worst stance is to follow Phil's concern.
                  If we only respond at the same place at which we are challenged,
                  nobody can lose by challenging us. They can only win.

This means, I think, that we have to do more. The Koreans and others would like to look us over and to see how we react. Under certain circumstances, in fact, some domestic cost is to our advantage in demonstrating the seriousness with which we view this kind of challenge.

President: Phil and I have argued for years.

Buchen: I have to state the problems that we face.

President: In this daylight cycle, unless something unusual comes up, we will try to prevent boats going to and from the island.

Kissinger: The latest intelligence shows that there are several small patrol boats near the island in the cove. I think we should sink them.

President: I agree.

Schlesinger: There are four boats.

President: I think we should sink any boats that can be used to try to move the Americans.

Rumsfeld: But not the ones that carry Americans.

Schlesinger: I disagree with Henry in one case. The legal situation in Indochina is unique. We should emphasize that. The restraints of our actions are different from the restraints anywhere else.

Kissinger: I would hit, and then deal with the legal implications.

President: Bill (Colby) should verify that the T-28's are there. At the second daylight cycle, we are prepared to do more. The HOLT will be there and the Marines will be ready to go on it and to be put on the island, with the B-52's and perhaps the aircraft from the CORAL SEA prepared to strike Kompong Som. But, unless there is some unusual development, the actual action will take place 24 hours later.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Schlesinger:	On the 16th.
Kissinger:	You can decide it then.
President:	The preferable time is 24 hours later.
Kissinger:	That is when the best forces will be available. But that has to be weighed against other considerations for the extra 24 hours that you lose. I remember 1969, when the EC-121 was shot down off Korea. We assembled forces like crazy. But in the end, we did not do anything. Maybe we shouldn't have. We will never know.
Colby:	There is one other justifiable target in the Kompong Som area. The old Cambodian Government had 25 patrol boats in the Ream Naval Base.
	(The President, Kissinger, and Schlesinger almost simultaneously remark along the lines that that might be a worthwhile target.)
Schlesinger:	But this sort of thing would require the gunships out of Thailand.
Kissinger:	I think we should do something that will impress the Koreans and the Chinese. I saw Teng Hsiao-Ping's comments in Paris.
President:	Are there an airfield and a naval base there at Kompong Som?
Colby:	Yes.
President:	Why not hit both of them? There would be as many objections to hitting one as two of them.
Schlesinger:	The question is whether you use the B-52's or the carrier aircraft. The B-52's may represent the best image for what Henry is trying to accomplish. But, for Congress and others, other aircraft would be better.
President:	Bill has to verify what there is at the airport.
Schlesinger:	We'll put some T-28's on the base.

President:	Tomorrow, we will still have the options as to what we should do.
Jones:	On Guam, if we are to do anything, we have to start pretty soon. But there are lots of press there.
Rumsfeld:	You would be launching at about 4:00 p.m. tomorrow.
Kissinger:	How long does it take to load?
Jones:	There are many planes to load and to get ready.
Kissinger:	Is the first thing tomorrow still time enough?
Jones:	I'm not sure.
President:	Are there any others in the Far East?
Jones:	Only at Utapao.
President:	We do not want that.
Rumsfeld:	It should not take long to calculate the answer on the question of using the CORAL SEA.
Vice President:	Everybody wants to know when you are moving. In New York, where I just was, people expect you to be doing things. So any steps you take in preparation will be understood.
President:	How many B-52's would you use?
Jones:	Perhaps 6 or 9.
President:	Let's say 9. How many do you have on Guam?
Jones:	I am not sure. About 20 or more.
President:	Every time I have looked at a B-52 base, they are always doing something. It should not be that unusual. I think you should load them, and get them ready.
Jones:	There are about 50 reporters on Guam right now, because of the refugees.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Kissinger: Can you tell the commander to shut up?

Schlesinger: It will get out, no matter how hard you try.

Vice President: Perhaps it would be good to have it get out. I don't think we should cavil.

President: Let's have them get ready to carry out the mission if we decide to do it.

Hartmann: I am not an expert on military affairs. I am just an old retired captain in the Reserve. I have been listening in terms of what the American public wants. I think the American public wants to know what you are going to do.

                  This crisis, like the Cuban missile crisis, is the first real test of your leadership. What you decide is not as important as what the public perceives.

                  Nothing, so far as I know, has gone out to the public so far, except that we are taking steps. It may be that we should let the public know something of the steps that you are taking. The public will judge you in accordance with what you do. We should not just think of what is the right thing to do, but of what the public perceives.

Kissinger: I would say nothing until afterwards. That will speak for itself. Then you can explain what you have been doing.

                  If you say something now, everybody will be kibitzing.

President: But the press should know of the NSC meeting.

Hartmann: I think we should consider what the people think we are doing.

Rumsfeld: The delay worries me.

Hartmann: Yes.

Kissinger: If we are going to do an integrated attack, I think we have to go in 22 hours. We should not wait for a later cycle.

                  I cannot judge if there would be a problem in taking the island. We're saying that it will be one annihilating blow. I cannot judge if 270 Marines can do it.

Rumsfeld: There would 500.

Kissinger: But there will be 270 for four hours. They will have the HOLT support. Perhaps they will also have some support from the CORAL SEA.

President: Do we have Marines on the CORAL SEA?

Jones: I'm not sure.

Kissinger: If the CORAL SEA can launch against Kompong Som, it can launch against the island. We have to be sure that the landing has a chance of success.

Jones: The probability that the Americans are gone causes the problem. I think we have a high probability.

Kissinger: Then my instinct is with Rummy. We should go tomorrow night or earlier.

President: Everything will be ready. But, if you do it in the next cycle, you have the problem of Thailand.

Kissinger: The ideal time would be Thursday night. But I am worried that in the next 48 hours some diplomatic pressure will occur, or something else. So we have to weigh the optimum military time against the optimum political time. For foreign policy and domestic reasons, tomorrow is better.

President: The Thai will be upset.

Kissinger: That is correct, but they will also be reassured.

Rumsfeld: Can we be sure there is anybody on the island? We might just take a walk.

Kissinger: If the Americans are on the mainland, then we have to rethink.

Rumsfeld:	If we look at this tonight, we will know tomorrow.
President:	If Jones goes back to the Pentagon tonight with the orders to prepare, we will have details tomorrow.
Jones:	Everything is now moving, except the B-52's.
Ingersoll:	What is the flying time of the B-52's?
Kissinger:	About 6 hours.
Jones:	Maybe longer.
Schlesinger:	Can we tanker them out of Guam?
Jones:	Yes.
Kissinger:	What will we say about the boats that have been sunk?
Buchen:	We have to make a report to the Hill.
Schlesinger:	It may not get out that quickly.
President:	My answer would be, that we have ordered that no enemy boats should leave the island or go out to it, but that if they did, they would be sunk.
Kissinger:	I think a low-key press statement can be issued, saying what has happened. We should tell the truth. We should say it in a very matter-of-fact way, at a DOD briefing.
Schlesinger:	It will not stay low-key.
President:	The order was issued that no boats should leave.
Kissinger:	We should say nothing about the riot control agents. We should say that there were Americans possibly being moved, and that lives were at stake. Some Americans are still on the island. In pursuit of these objectives, the following boats were sunk.

One other reason is that it is not inconceivable that the Khmers will cave, and they should come in response to something that we had done. |

TOP SECRET /SENSITIVE - XGDS

Schlesinger: Should we say that they were sunk from aircraft from Thailand? That is your problem.

Kissinger: I am worried about it getting out of hand. We will look sneaky and furtive about something we should be proud of.

                But the Thai thing does give me trouble. I think the Thai military will love it. But the Thai Government will say that it does not like it.

                The Liberals on the Hill will put forward a recommendation to withdraw our forces from Thailand. They will match this with some requests from the Thai Government.

Rumsfeld: I think that is a good issue.

Hartmann: Bob Byrd, whom I regard as a good antenna of sentiment, says that we should act.

Marsh: Case says we should go in.

Vice President: In our statement, should we not call them launches?

Schlesinger: The boats are of different sizes.

Kissinger: I would urge that the spokesman make a short announcement at noon tomorrow. He should explain why we are doing it. He should say that it was ordered by you, executed by the National Security Council, and then answer no other questions. This would be noon. By 8 o'clock, we will have decided the other. That will add to your strength.

                (General concurrence.)

END OF MEETING

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

3540   MINUTES

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

Date: Wednesday, May 14, 1975

Time: 3:52 p.m. - 5:42 p.m.

Place: Cabinet Room, the White House

Subject: Seizure of American Ship by Cambodian
                   Authorities

Principals

The President
The Vice President
Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger
Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger
Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones, USAF
The Director of Central Intelligence William Colby

Other Attendees

State: Deputy Secretary of State Robert Ingersoll

Defense: Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements
                   Admiral James L. Holloway

WH: Donald Rumsfeld
                   John Marsh
                   Robert Hartmann
                   Philip Buchen

NSC: Lt. General Brent Scowcroft
                   W. R. Smyser

DECLASSIFIED • E.O. 12958 Sec. 3.6
With PORTIONS EXEMPTED
E.O. 12958 Sec. 1.5 (a)(b)(c)(d)

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS   MR 91-30, #4 NSC ltr. 2/19/96
                                     By KBH NARA, Date 3/20/96

96

President:	Bill (Colby), can we have your report on the latest situation?
Colby:	Mr. President, we have some new information on the status of Khmer Communist forces in the Kompong Som - Koh Tang area.

The most recent reconnaissance concerning naval craft indicates that there are 24 armed ships in the vicinity of Kompong Som -- 13 coastal patrol boats, 10 riverine patrol boats, and one submarine chaser.

In addition, there are 3 utility launching craft (LCUs) at Kompong Som, and one LCM at Ream.

As for air strength, our preliminary analysis of 12 May · · · · · · · · · · showed three T-28 fighters and a total of six transport aircraft at Kompong Som airfield next to the port. There is also a substantial remaining number of some 100 T-28 aircraft left at Pochentong Airfield near Phnom Penh when it fell.

For air defense, the Communists have apparently deployed antiaircraft artillery near Kompong Som and Ream. Preliminary analysis of 13 May photography shows that there is one 37-mm antiaircraft position just south of Kompong Som, and two 37-mm positions southeast of Ream.

These weapons are some threat to aircraft flying within 3 nautical miles of their location, and under 14,000 feet.

In ground strength, KC combat forces at Kompong Som total some 2,000 troops. This force could be quickly augmented by the remaining 14,000 troops scattered throughout southwestern Cambodia.

· ·
· ·
· ·
· ·

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Photoreconnaissance of 13-14 May identified
a probable 105-mm howitzer position and a
possible coastal artillery position of unidentified
caliber just south of Ream.

We have now observed one more large landing
craft (LCU) at Kompong Som than reported in
last night's briefing.   This ship could trans-
port 800 troops.   This gives the KC the
ability to move about 2,400 troops simultaneously.

These landing craft, if unopposed, could reach
Koh Tang Island in a little over 4 hours.

The Cambodians have apparently transported
at least some of the American crew from Koh
Tang Island to the mainland, putting them
ashore at Kompong Som port at about 11:00
last night, Washington time.

Kissinger:	How do you know that?
Colby:	From observation.
President:	Of the boat last night?
Clements:	That would be just the pilot report.
Colby:	There is some more information.

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Bringing at least some of the crew ashore
suggests that the Cambodians appreciate the
value of the American crew as hostages,

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

offering hope that they will be kept alive by
their captors to preserve their usefulness
as bargaining chips.

The Americans taken ashore may have been
transported further inland by the Cambodians,
and at present there is no way of telling
where they may be.

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
          . . . .

Of the five Cambodian gunboats that were
deployed as of last night (Washington time)
around Koh Tang Island, three have been
sunk by American aircraft.

At latest report, only one gunboat remained
a little over a mile south of the island.

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

Around midnight (Washington time), a U.S.
tanker enroute to Bangkok reported that a
Swedish-registered refrigerator ship near
Panjang Island, well south of Koh Tang, had
been attacked and shot at by a Cambodian
boat. At 5:00 a.m. a U.S. reconnaissance
aircraft observed the ship. It showed no
sign of distress, and now appears on its

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

99

normal course to Bangkok. A small boat, not believed to be a gunboat, was sighted 3 miles away, following the ship's same course and speed. According to press reports from Thailand, a Panamanian freighter was detained for about two hours in the same area today.

President: Is the HOLT there now?

Jones:	Yes. The WILSON is there too.
President:	Is this also a destroyer or a destroyer escort?
Admiral Holloway:	This is a destroyer. It will be on station by 1750 Eastern Daylight Time. That means we will have two ships on station before we begin our operations.
Kissinger:	Why are we not sinking the boats?
Jones:	The report we have did not indicate it.
Kissinger:	What mission has been given to the HOLT and to the WILSON?
Jones:	The WILSON is just coming on station. We will instruct it.
Kissinger:	Is the HOLT instructed to stop ship movement to the island?
Jones:	The HOLT is now about 12 miles out beyond the island. It is not able to stop movement to and from the island. The reason it is that far out is that we did not want to tip our hand to the operation.
President:	I had the impression that the HOLT would station itself between the ships and the land. I am amazed at this.
Jones:	It is night, Mr. President. I do not recall any specific instructions to this regard.
President:	It does no good to have the destroyer 12 miles out. It can't stop a boat. Why did we hurry to get it there if it is going to stay that far out?
Jones:	We got it there because we wanted it to help in the operations we will conduct.

Rumsfeld:	How about the T-28's that are now at Phnom Penh airport? Could they help oppose our operation at Kompong Som?
Colby:	Yes, but they could not remain in the air for long at that distance from their base.
Jones:	They are not a real factor.
Rumsfeld:	I am thinking of the airport. If they could use it, then we would have a stronger argument to hit the airport.
Jones:	Theoretically they could, but they would not have much time on station.
President:	When does the CORAL SEA get there? What about the HANCOCK or the OKINAWA?
Admiral Holloway:	CORAL SEA aircraft are now within the range of the objective area. So it's on station. The HOLT is also on station. She stayed out beyond the island because of the plan to put Marines on her. That is why she is over the horizon. The CORAL SEA is within the range of tactical air and can put them in. The HANCOCK could arrive on the scene around noon of the 16th, D. C. time. She is loaded with helicopters. The WILSON will be on station this evening.
President:	So, as of now, the HOLT is there, the CORAL SEA is ready, and the WILSON will be there soon.
Admiral Holloway:	In two hours.
President:	What is the recommendation of the Defense Department now regarding operations?

TOP ~~SECRET~~/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Schlesinger: Dave (Jones), please give it.

Jones: (Showing a chart) We recommend that we land
                    tonight on the island and on the ship. We can
                    do it with high assurance of success. We have
                    the B-52's on alert but we do not recommend
                    using them. From the targeting standpoint,
                    it represents overkill. We might use them for
                    political or diplomatic reasons, though that
                    would seem mixed.

President: Are all the chart numbers in our time?

Jones: Yes.

                    We would send people as follows:

                        The Marines to recapture the boat and to
                    dismantle any explosive agents.

                        The helicopters can go at first light. They
                    can get people onto the Holt. It would take
                    two hours for people to get organized and cross
                    to the MAYAGUEZ. They could start out with
                    riot control agents. This probably would not
                    incapacitate them long, perhaps for about 10
                    minutes. The HOLT would then come along-
                    side and all the Marines would come over and
                    hopefully seize control of the vessel. Our
                    Marines would inspect it, so would an OD
                    team. Then it would be moved out.

President: The helicopters come from where?

Jones: From Utapao.

                    Next, the tactical air. We have tactical air on
                    the scene now. We have gunships, fighters, etc.
                    We can suppress fire. We have instructions to
                    minimize fire in case the Americans are there,
                    but to protect the people who are landing.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

	Eight helicopters with 175 Marines aboard will land on the island around sunrise. There is a four-hour recycle time to Utapao. The next wave of 235 or more would then come to give us over 600 Marines on the island by dark.
	The 175 can secure themselves, with gunships and tactical air. When the second group arrives, we can cut off the neck of the island and move out.
President:	I understand our time for this is 1845, but that it is already the 15th over there. Is that 0645 or 0745 over there?
Jones:	It is about 0545. It is around sunrise.
	Here is a picture of the island. The Marine in charge has reconnoitered it.
	A close check indicates an open area with trails leading into the woods. This is the preferred landing zone. Also, they might land on the beach. It is wide enough. It is the only opening on the island. Later, we would want to cut the island in two.
	With somewhat over 600 Marines by nightfall, we should have a good feel for what is there.
	We can perhaps withdraw the next day. We could bring the Marines out to the CORAL SEA. This gets them out of Thailand. Or, of course, we could go back by Thailand.
	Tactical air based in Thailand would provide most of the cover. It has the gunships and the riot control agents.
	That is the operation as we recommend it, as a joint recommendation from all the Joint Chiefs.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President:	What about the CORAL SEA and B-52's?
Jones:	There are three targets:

      -- First, the airfield at Kompong Som.
      -- Second, the naval port.
      -- Third, the regular port.

      There is not much to hit on the airfield. There is not much around the naval port. Greater targeting is around the other port. We have found two ships of unidentified registry, with other craft around also. There are about 10 boats there. Eight of them look like fast patrol craft; one is unknown; one other is a medium landing craft.

President:	Where are they located?
Jones:	They are along one dock.

      There are buildings, POL, and other things in the area.

      If we choose to apply the B-52's, we could put three on one target, three on the other, and six on a third. This would cover the area of the targets.

President:	Does this include the breakwater also?
Jones:	We would cover the breakwater in one portion of the target area. But it would be very difficult to damage it. You would have to have a direct hit.

      The B-52's would take about six hours from Guam. They fly at a high altitude so there is no threat to them.

Vice President:	I thought they would be on their way by now.

TOP ~~SECRET~~/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President:	No.
Schlesinger:	No. We just put them in readiness.
	With a unit of three aircraft, there would be about 125 weapons. The concentration is in the center. They would probably not hit the breakwater.
Jones:	As for the CORAL SEA, it has about 48 aircraft. About 100 smart bombs are available, such as laser guided or Walleyes. They could be used with great precision. We would first send armed reconnaissance and then go for heavy targets like construction, POL, the warehouses, etc.
Admiral Holloway:	We have 21 F-4's, 24 A-7's, and 6 A-6's. There are 81 guided munitions on the CORAL SEA. They are about halfway split between laser and the Walleyes.
President:	What will be the extent of the damage from the CORAL SEA as compared with the B-52's?
Jones:	With the bombs from the carrier you could take out key targets. With the B-52's, you get more bombs, interdiction of the runway and of the port, etc. We would get additional buildings, including collateral damage.
	The key targets you could get from the CORAL SEA. With B-52's, you will get mass.
President:	What would be the altitude?
Admiral Holloway:	About 6000.
Kissinger:	How is the weather?
Admiral Holloway:	It is now suitable. It might be cloudy from time to time, but not for long.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Jones:	The prediction is for patchy areas.
	With the CORAL SEA, we would have a continuous flow shifting from target to target.
Kissinger:	How long will the operation continue?
Jones:	From about 2250 tonight until the end of the day (6:00 a.m. tomorrow).
Kissinger:	How many aircraft?
Jones:	About 70 percent of the aircraft. We would use a lot at first, and less later.
President:	They could reload and come back.
Jones:	That's right. They could recycle.
Rumsfeld:	What is the purpose of having it go 8 hours?
Jones:	To hit all the targets. It could be less.
Kissinger:	Would we keep it up while the Marines are on the island?
Admiral Holloway:	The operation on the island is being supported from Thailand. We would have, from the CORAL SEA, a number of aircraft and targets.
	You would have, with those aircraft, enough to hit all the targets?
Jones:	Not the breakwater or the runway, but everything else.
Vice President:	But they would have time to get all the ships into action. As it stands now, the B-52's would not get there until later.
Jones:	We could start from the CORAL SEA earlier.

Kissinger:	I have a question. You are landing on the island at 6:45 a. m. and on the ship at 8:45 a. m.; could they not sink the ship?
Jones:	As for the island, our timing decision is based on the capacity of the helicopters and on the cycles we need to run. It is already sliding slightly.
Kissinger:	This helps you with the bombing.
Schlesinger:	That has already slid.
Vice President:	Then you won't get all the Marines from Thailand?
Schlesinger:	We cannot. There are 1200 of them.
President:	Is this your recommendation on how it should be handled, and is it just a matter of time?
Jones:	We would need to get the order out as soon as possible.
President:	They should launch both operations as quickly as possible.
Admiral Holloway:	At first light.
Jones:	That's right. But that may be a moot question. We will have good communications in order to be able to follow everything.
Clements:	On the HOLT, let's be specific. We are supposed to have real time voice, as well as two-minute interval coded communication.
President:	How soon do you estimate that the three helicopters, with 63 Marines, will be airborne?
Jones:	It should be within an hour.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President:	They are about 40 minutes behind your schedule.
Jones:	They should still make it.
Kissinger:	They are leaving simultaneously.
Jones:	The HOLT is first.
	(At this point, Admiral Holloway leaves the room to communicate instructions.)
President:	Now, regarding the B-52's and the CORAL SEA.
Jones:	There are various possible times on this.
Marsh:	Are you taking the island to get it or the people?
Schlesinger:	Because of the people there.
Rumsfeld:	We will plan to take off from the island in 24 hours.
Kissinger:	I would not answer how long we will stay there. We should say that we will try to find our people. We are not sure how long it may be.
Rumsfeld:	Privately, we should say we will not stay long enough so that we would lose face and have to get off too late.
Kissinger:	There is no point in staying on the island after we have searched it for our men. But I think we should not assure anybody ahead of time when we will leave. We will move at our own pace.
Schlesinger:	What about any prisoners we take?
Kissinger:	I would keep them.
Colby:	Remembering what happened at Son Tay, I would say that we are planning to look for people who might possibly be there. We should not be too positive that they are there.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President:	The point is that we are going there to get our people, not the island.
Jones:	With the CORAL SEA, one suggestion that has been made is to issue an ultimatum that would say that within so many hours, unless you tell us you are releasing the Americans, there would be air strikes. We could also do that with the B-52 strikes.
Rumsfeld:	Regarding the ultimatum, I think there are three ways to do it:

        -- First, publicly.
        -- Second, privately or diplomatically.
        -- Third, you can get into a taffy pull with the people on the scene.

        I think one and three are bad ideas. The best is the second. It must be specific and must have a diplomatic initiative.

Kissinger:	We sent a message to the Secretary General today. We could not get a better way to communicate with the Cambodians.

        That message was delivered at one o'clock.

        We thought of giving an ultimatum in Peking, but it is too complicated in terms of the time involved.

Schlesinger:	How about a local ultimatum?
Kissinger:	I have no objection. But I do not believe that our action should be dependent on an ultimatum.

        Fundamentally, the purpose of our strikes is to protect our operations. I could be talked into taking out the 100 aircraft at Phnom Penh, but I do not want to upset people too much.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

	But we should move massively and firmly. We should say that we are going to protect the operation to get out our people.
Buchen:	I do not agree. If they are not there on the island, you then issue the ultimatum.
President:	Supposing we do not find them all? If the operation is carried out in proper time sequence, they will land on the island at 1845 and on the HOLT earlier. (Points to General Jones' chart) On the schedule you have there, the CORAL SEA is about two hours after the HOLT, and about 4 hours after the island operation. In that space of time they can find out whether the Americans are on the ship or on the island.
Kissinger:	The first group cannot search.
President:	No, but it can perhaps find out if the Americans are there. That gives us some flexibility.

But I do not think we should delay. I think we should go on schedule. Then, whether or not we find the Americans, you can strike. |
| Buchen: | But an ultimatum may be the only way to get the Americans out. |
| Kissinger: | Rather than have an ultimatum, I would advance the strikes.

I think it is essential in situations of this kind to make clear that it is we who define the hazards. We can argue that we are doing this to protect our operation. What we have to get across to other countries is that we will not confine ourselves to the areas in which they challenge us.

So I think we should do the strikes at the time of the operation. Then, if we have not found our people, we can mine or do other things. |

We can also issue an ultimatum. We can say that the 100 aircraft was a protective operation. Of course, we would have some difficulties with people on the Hill and with others.

Colby:
The problem is that the KC could put 2,400 people on that island within 4 hours, if they are not blocked.

President:
So we have two reasons to speed up the CORAL SEA operations, so that its first attack coincides with the attack on the island and on the ship. If we use the CORAL SEA, you are then using it to protect the people on the operation. Second, if you use the CORAL SEA with the smart bombs, you are hitting military targets and you will not possibly do harm to Americans.

Rumsfeld:
There are only 80 smart bombs.

Jones:
But we have other armaments.

Buchen:
You have two neutral ships. With an ultimatum, they have a chance to get out.

Jones:
I suggest we expedite the CORAL SEA as soon as possible. It cannot go before the other operations, but at the same time. It would go after mobile targets at first, and other targets later.

Rumsfeld:
The logic is to protect the operation.

Buchen:
But we should avoid the neutral ships.

President:
If they are Cambodian ships, we should sink them.

Schlesinger:
The leak regarding the B-52's is not too bad. It shows that the President will use them if necessary.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President:	I think you should reexamine the CORAL SEA operation with the expectation to keep it going. Henry, what do you think?
Kissinger:	My recommendation is to do it ferociously. We should not just hit mobile targets, but others as well.
Schlesinger:	We will destroy whatever targets there are.
President:	And they should not stop until we tell them.
Buchen:	You have the requirement for consultation with Congress. If you hit buildings, you might hit Americans.
Schlesinger:	I think they would have moved the Americans 20 miles inland as soon as possible.
Admiral Holloway:	If we now go to use the CORAL SEA it will hit before we take the ship. The first wave will hit targets connected with the operation. Later waves will hit other targets, including the three that we have discussed: the airfield and the ports.
Schlesinger:	They cannot fracture the runways.
President:	Can you get the boats?
Schlesinger:	That is possible.
President:	I think we should hit the planes, the boats, and the ships if they are Cambodian.
Schlesinger:	We will make a positive identification that they are Cambodian.
Admiral Holloway:	On the first operation, the fighters will come back and report. First, you can go for the runways; second you can come back with the required strikes.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Schlesinger:	How soon?
Holloway:	Three hours.
Schlesinger:	That would be about 7 o'clock.
Kissinger:	They should not strike at the mainland before the HOLT can get to the ship.
Schlesinger:	So we will go with a 2045 time.
Admiral Holloway:	O.K.
	(Admiral Holloway leaves again to pass on instructions.)
Schlesinger:	Is there any change in our estimate regarding the forces on the island?
Colby:	No.
Hartmann:	Do we have any estimate of American casualties?
Jones:	It is very hard to make a precise estimate. We do not know what there is. Saying that there would be ten people killed would be too precise.
Schlesinger:	It might be 20 to 30.
Clements:	Sooner or later you will get a linkage with the 23 already lost at NKP.
President:	Any other questions?
Schlesinger:	We are in position to do the SAR operation. If we hit again Kompong Som, will our people go in over land if they are hit?
Jones:	We will have SAR aircraft. They could go down over land. It is conceivable.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President:	What is the distance between the targets and Kompong Som itself?
Colby:	About 15 kilometers.
Jones:	About 10 miles.
Rumsfeld:	Did you say that the Marines could be recovered on the CORAL SEA? Is this an option?
Jones:	No plan is yet finalized.
Kissinger:	They could go on the HANCOCK.
Rumsfeld:	Our preferred option is not to have them return to Thailand.
President:	According to the schedule, the HANCOCK will arrive at 0400 on Friday. It could be the recovery vessel for the Marines being taken off.
Schlesinger:	Augmenting the B-52 picture of being ready is that we are continuing to amass forces.
Rumsfeld:	We should not announce the termination.
President:	Will the WILSON link with the HOLT?
Jones:	Yes; also the CORAL SEA. The HANCOCK may be delayed. Even so, we will not take the Marines back to Thailand.
Rumsfeld:	Did you decide on an ultimatum after the strikes?
Kissinger:	We could use bullhorns to inform the Cambodians on the island. They should not negotiate. They should just state our demands. I think that once we start we should finish and get out.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Ingersoll:	Shouldn't we remove the Marines out of Thailand once the operation has been launched?
Schlesinger:	It is not necessary.
Ingersoll:	We will have riots tomorrow.
Jones:	We have 1200 at Utapao. I suggest we undertake an airlift to get them out, once we decide we do not need them.
Kissinger:	Then we can announce that we have withdrawn them.
Buchen:	I have not understood how Henry (Kissinger) is planning to proceed.
Kissinger:	I think it will not work unless we hit. Then we can give an ultimatum that is credible. We have many things we can still do later. We can mine, or we can take out the planes at Phnom Penh. Then we will be in a long test. We will not have gained by not hitting Kompong Som.
Rumsfeld:	Tomorrow Congress is back in session.
President:	We have a lot of activity going. Let's see it then.
Kissinger:	We should not give the impression that we will stop.
Hartmann:	How will the Cambodians know what to do if they decide to let our people go?
Jones:	We will have a bullhorn. We can tell them what to do.
Kissinger:	The odds are that the people of the island have no orders and will sit tight.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Clements: I don't think the Americans are there anyway.

Kissinger: They could be. We do not know.

President: We are speculating on how many there were in the ship that got away.

Colby: The pilot said he saw eight or so. He said there were others in the HOLT. He speculated it might be the full 39.

Jones: We should word our release carefully so we say that we want to remove the Americans and get information on their whereabouts. There may also be value in capturing Cambodians.

Kissinger: The problem is that we do not know that they are not there. Taking the island if they are not there is easier to explain than failing to take it if they are.

Hartmann: Could a gunboat carry 39 people?

Colby: Yes.

Jones: We should say that we wanted to get the Americans. Even if we did not get them, it would be useful to talk to the Cambodians to find out what they know.

Kissinger: We should have one clear line of this.

Colby: We need to be braced against that pilot.

Schlesinger: We have an obligation to get the Americans or to see if they are there.

Rumsfeld: We need to make plans on press handling between now and midnight.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Hartmann:	We should talk a little about Congressional consultation.
	Last night, we gave the leadership information on your actions. They agreed. They said that they were advised, but not consulted. We reported the attacks to them. Again, they supported you. Today, in the House, people are saying that there was no consultation under the War Powers Act.
	I have a summary of the Congressional response. I also have a summary of the House and Senate responses to our statements. During the afternoon, it was agreed to provide limited briefings to the House and Senate Foreign Affairs Committees. They want more information. We are sticking to the leadership. We have not expanded on the earlier material.
	The question now is what notification and consultation should proceed. There is a suggestion that you call Mansfield and Albert, but then others will be mad.
	We can bring the people over here, or we can call them.
President:	What does the law say?
Buchen:	The law says to consult before the introduction of forces and then to consult regularly. There is also a requirement for a report 48 hours after an action. We have to get that report in tonight.
Kissinger:	When did this action start, from the legal standpoint?
Buchen:	When you got the gunships in.
Kissinger:	Maybe you should get the leadership in tonight.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Buchen:	That is what the Congress really wants.
President:	How soon could they be down here?
Marsh:	By 6:30 p.m.
Rumsfeld:	As I understand it, consultation means telling them in time so that they can oppose the action. But we cannot worry about it, though they will complain that it is not consultation.
Kissinger:	I think we should give them the history of the diplomatic effort. We should tell them that there was no response and that we had to go ahead. I do not think we should give them details on our strikes.
President:	We should say that we will land on the ship and on the island.
Rumsfeld:	From the political standpoint, we should get your friends and brief them, so that they can stand up and fight for you.
President:	Jack (Marsh), can you ask them to come down here? Whom would you ask?
Marsh:	I would ask the leadership, such as the Speaker, the Floor leaders, the Whips, and others. I would also get the Foreign Affairs and Armed Services Committee leaders and ranking Minority members of both Houses.
Rumsfeld:	I would do Anderson separately, perhaps at 7 o'clock.
Schlesinger:	The plans regarding air strikes should be presented to show that the targets will be carefully selected. We should not just talk about "a few" strikes, but about "selective" strikes.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

	I would recommend that the Republican leadership be among the group you are briefing.
Kissinger:	But we must ask them to keep quiet. They will be briefed before the operation starts.
Vice President:	Perhaps 10 o'clock would be better.
Kissinger:	How about 10 o'clock?
President:	Would it be to our benefit to delay?
Buchen:	I would not.
Marsh:	The statute says to consult before initiation of action.
Vice President:	You have already done that.
Marsh:	But we have not yet told them that we are executing.
Vice President:	What if the group is opposed? What should the President do?
Kissinger:	He would have to go ahead anyway.
Vice President:	I was asked today by a business group when you would react. They applauded when I said that you would be firm.
President:	I have had similar reactions.
Kissinger:	What about informing the public? Should we use national television?
Hartmann:	Perhaps after it's over.
Kissinger:	Let us do the beginning low key, and then go to a fuller description. Perhaps we should just do a brief announcement at first. (To Schlesinger) I thought your statement read well.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

120

Rumsfeld:	You do not want to look as if, in being firm, you are being crimped by the Congress.
	Regarding the B-52's, the Congress would say you should not use them. Then you stand them down, as if in response to Bella Abzug. Should we perhaps stand them down now?
Kissinger:	I would ignore Bella and then explain the B-52's. If it works, it will not matter. If not, we will have other things to worry about. You will look implacable and calm and in control.
	Perhaps you should give a ten-minute speech.
Hartmann:	How about other countries?
Kissinger:	That is a good idea.
Rumsfeld:	You should let NATO know, for once.
Hartmann:	Are there any press on board?
Kissinger:	(To Ingersoll) We should get Sisco to organize messages. We should not use SEATO.
Vice President:	I think that's good.
President:	What do we want when the leadership is here?
Kissinger:	I think we should have no military men, but just Jim and myself. I could brief on the diplomatic steps. You would say what you have ordered.
Schlesinger:	What should we say?
Kissinger:	We should tell them about the island, about the ship, and about the related strikes on military targets to make the operation succeed.
Rumsfeld:	The first question will be, will the Marines land on the island.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Kissinger:	We should not say yet.
Vice President:	They will know about the ship three hours in advance. They can scuttle it.
Kissinger:	Is it better to wait until 10 o'clock?
Buchen and Rumsfeld:	No.
President:	You go ahead.

MEMORANDUM

3415X

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~   May 16, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

PARTICIPANTS: President Ford
                     Vice President Rockefeller
                     Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State
                       and Assistant to the President for
                       National Security Affairs
                     James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense
                     Bipartisan Leadership (List attached)

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, May 14, 1975
                     6:40 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

PLACE: The Cabinet Room
                     The White House

SUBJECT: The MAYAGUEZ Incident

The President: I thought that it was important that I ask you down here
and fill   you in on a little of the history of the events this week and
tell you of the decisions I made an hour ago. I felt this was the best
way under the circumstances that I could comply with the War Powers
Act and inform you of the actions I feel are necessary to take.

Let me give you a brief chronology of the events since last Monday. We
were notified by the shipping company early Monday morning that their
ship had been taken. I was informed of this at my 7:40 a.m. intelli-
gence briefing. I convened a meeting of the National Security Council
at noon that day and I directed that the Department of State immediately
convey a message to the Government of Cambodia demanding the release
of the ship. At 4:30 Monday afternoon, the Acting Secretary of State
called in the head of the PRC liaison office to read him a similar
statement asking him to transmit it to the Cambodian Government.
This message demanded the immediate release of the vessel and the

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~ XGDS

crew and said that if they were not released, the Government of Cambodia would be responsible for the consequences. The Chief of the Liaison Office did not accept the message, but we are confident that he communicated its contents to Peking. To make sure, however, that the message got through, we instructed our Liaison Office in Peking to deliver the same message to the Cambodian embassy in Peking. This was done at midnight our time Monday.

Also on Monday evening we learned that the Cambodians were moving the ship to a small island off the coast. The following morning we learned the Cambodians were moving the crew members from the ship to Koh Tang Island. The ship was anchored about two miles from the island, which is a small island about 1/2 mile wide and three miles long. The ship is still dead in the water near the island. (Secretary Kissinger points out these locations on the large map.)

On Tuesday morning at a second NSC meeting, I ordered American military forces in the area to maintain strict surveillance over the ship and to prevent any movement of boats from the ship to the mainland and the island. Our forces were to use the minimum force necessary. During this time we carefully covered the entire area with air surveillance.

After ordering that action, I asked Max Friedersdorf and Jack Marsh to inform the Congressional leadership of these decisions. At 8:30 p.m. last night, there were indications that the Cambodians were moving the captive crewmen from the ship to the mainland. I had ordered our planes to take warning measures against any such movements and to prevent them if necessary. During the course of the night, three Cambodian launches were destroyed after they disregarded such warnings; four other boats were damaged and one reached the port of Kompong Som, which is the old port of Sihanoukville. This boat possibly had some American captives aboard. Kompong Som is roughly 20 miles from where the ship is anchored. Also, I should mention that during the attempts to stop or destroy the Cambodian boats, some of our planes received small arms fire.

At another NSC meeting last night that lasted until 1:00 a.m., I ordered the following actions:

     -- a Marine group would be made ready to retake the MAYAGUEZ.

-- Another Marine group would be made ready to seize Koh Tang Island.

-- The aircraft carrier CORAL SEA, on its way to Australia, would be turned around and headed toward the area of the ship's capture.

-- The destroyer escort HOLT was told to move into the area with the destroyer WILSON following behind it.

-- The helicopter carrier HANCOCK was also ordered to move into the area.

-- B-52 forces were alerted for action.

Another NSC meeting was held at 3:30 this afternoon. Just before this meeting, we notified the Congress of the results of last night's action. At noon today, we reiterated our message to the Cambodians through the United Nations Secretary General. As a result of this afternoon's NSC meeting, I have ordered the following actions, and let me say that it is of maximum importance that nothing be said to the press as you leave the White House since for the next few hours the actions I have ordered will not be started or completed, and any discussion of these actions could endanger the forces involved.

-- I have ordered a U.S. Marine group to land on the destroyer escort WILSON, which will then move alongside the MAYAGUEZ and the Marines will board and retake it.

-- Another group of Marines will land on Koh Tang Island.

-- To protect these Marine forces, aircraft from the CORAL SEA will attack selective targets, including the airfield at Kompong Som and the major naval air station at Ream. The purpose of these strikes is to protect our Marine forces moving against the island and retaking the MAYAGUEZ.

Our anticipation is that all three of these activities will occur at the same time within a couple of hours from now. Henry, do you have anything to add at this point?

Secretary Kissinger: The only thing I can add is that, at your orders, we did publish the note given to the Secretary General of the UN, believing that this was the quickest way to communicate its contents

to Peking. We also urged the UN Secretary General to use his influence to get the Cambodians to release the ship. At this point we have heard nothing from the Cambodians. I would also point out that when we delivered our note to the Cambodian embassy in Peking we also delivered a copy of it to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was returned 24 hours later, and we think that its contents were transmitted to the Cambodians but the PRC would not want to be in a position of appearing to assist us in this effort.

Secretary Schlesinger: The Marine attack group will land by helicopter on the destroyer at daybreak. The group will also contain interpreters, a crew to run the ship, and a demolition team. At the same time, the first wave of Marines will land on the island. All of this will be underway as of 9:00 p.m. tonight.

Speaker Albert: Was there any danger that the U.S. crew might be on some of the Cambodian boats that were destroyed.

The President: We have no sure way of knowing where the crew is or whether any of the crew members were on the boats attacked.

Question: Which way were the boats going?

The President: Most were moving from the island to the mainland. They refused to follow the warnings they were given.

Senator Scott: The Deputy Secretary of State made a distinction in his testimony before our committee this afternoon about the ships which were attacked. The one which was sunk did not appear to have many people on it. The other ship had lots of people visible on the deck so the planes did not sink it.

Secretary Kissinger: The attack on that ship was stopped when the pilot thought he saw Americans or at least Caucasians on the deck.

The President: However, we all have to keep in mind that these planes were flying very fast and at relatively high altitudes.

Question: Is there any possibility that the MAYAGUEZ had picked up any Vietnamese refugees from off the shore of Vietnam?

Secretary Schlesinger: We have some indications of Vietnamese in the area, but we don't know that there were any on the ship.

Senator Mansfield: Mr. President, why are we again going into the mainland of Asia, especially at a time when we almost have the boat in our custody once again. I am deeply concerned by this aspect of your decision.

The President: Let me explain the basis for my decision. There are warplanes at the Kompong Som airport and at Ream, which is a major naval station. The actions I have ordered are to make sure that whatever forces they have in the area cannot be used against our Marines moving to take the ship and the island. I am told that they have some 2400 troops also at Kompong Som.

Senator Mansfield: Are any of the Americans being held on the mainland?

The President: We have only sketchy knowledge of their whereabouts.

Senator Mansfield: Are there armed Cambodians aboard the ship now? What happened to the Americans on the ship?

Secretary Schlesinger: We have to presume that there are armed Cambodian forces on the ship.

The President: We really don't know where the Americans are -- if they are on the island or on the ship.

Senator Byrd: Could we have intercepted the Cambodian boats?

The President: No, we could not. We had only aircraft in the area. We had no surface vessels in the area. The destroyer HOLT arrived there only several hours later.

Question: Do we have intercepted messages of the presence of Americans on the boats we sunk?

Secretary Schlesinger: We have some radio intercepts, but they are ambiguous and not at all clear.

Question: What about a Swedish vessel reported captured in the same area?

Secretary Schlesinger: We have reports it was stopped but it is now proceeding unimpeded.

Senator Eastland: Mr. President, nobody will agree with me, but I'm for bombing the hell out of them.

Senator Byrd: What about reports of the Thais calling for the removal of our Marines?

The President: Thailand was the only place we could carry out military operations against the island or the ship. We have no intention of returning those Marines to Thailand. They will go to our ships after the operation is completed.

Secretary Kissinger: The Thais did not give us an exact time limit for the Marines' removal. ·

The President: The Marines will be recovered by the HANCOCK and the CORAL SEA.

Representative O'Neill: What was the nature of the U. S. ship? What cargo was it carrying and where was it when it was captured?

The President: It was a commercial cargo ship carrying a normal cargo.

Secretary Kissinger: The MAYAGUEZ was seized 60 miles off the coast of Cambodia in the regular shipping lanes.

The President: There is an interesting fact about the island involved. It has been disputed by the Cambodians and the Vietnamese. There are also indications that oil might be there and, therefore, there is some speculation the Cambodians want to assert their authority at an early point.

An important point in this whole matter is that we have had no word from the Cambodians.

Senator Stennis: Are all the Marines in Thailand being used in this operation?

The President: Not all of them, but none of the Marines used in the operation will be returning to Thailand.

Senator Mansfield: What about the cargo on that ship. There have been some rumors on the Hill about what it may have been carrying.

Secretary Schlesinger: There was some military PX cargo within the normal commercial cargo aboard the ship, but the nature of the cargo is not an item of dispute in this matter.

The Vice President: Mr. President, you will want to mention that the objective of putting the Marines on the island is to get any of the American captives who may be held there.

The President: Yes, we want to ensure that we get any of our captives held there.

Question: Are the Americans on the island? We certainly can't allow them to be taken off the ship to the mainland.

The President: We have to find out where the Americans are being held. We will be here most of the night as this operation proceeds.

Question: Are there any inhabitants on the island?

The President: We don't know. Our intelligence speculates that there are some Cambodians on the island.

Question: Has the surveillance of the ship been continuous since it was taken?

The President: We don't know precisely when the air surveillance started. It has been 24 hours a day since at least Monday afternoon.

Secretary Schlesinger: All the evidence we have indicates that the Cambodians consider the Americans a valuable asset. We have evidence that they are trying to take care of them, to protect them as a valuable asset. We doubt that they are inclined to dispose of their captives.

Secretary Kissinger: They are valuable to the Cambodians as hostages.

The President: I want to reiterate that we are hitting the selected military targets on the mainland to ensure that the Cambodians cannot attack us.

Question: Shouldn't we wait until we are attacked before hitting the mainland?

Secretary Schlesinger: We have already been fired upon.

Question: Will you report to the Congress within 48 hours?

The President: We will respond in writing as the War Powers Act requires.

Senator McClellan: Mr. President, why are we attacking the mainland first? Isn't this provocative? Shouldn't we wait until we are attacked?

The President: It is my judgment that we have to take these actions to protect our troops in their operation against the island and the ship. We would be negligent to do otherwise.

Senator McClellan: I think this is using too much force without really knowing whether it is needed or not.

Representative O'Neill: It was reported on the Hill that the ship was a Pentagon charter.

Secretary Schlesinger: It was not.

Speaker Albert: It was said on the floor this morning that the law was not being complied with and the War Powers Act was not being followed. I was told repeatedly to tell you to send someone up to brief the House.

The President: We are faced with the fact that the Cambodians have seized a U.S. ship and American citizens. As Commander-in-Chief I have the right to use appropriate military force to recover them. We did give proper notice and we waited until today to take action against the Cambodians. I believe that regardless of the 1973 law, I have the authority as Commander-in-Chief to take this action. Of course, the War Powers Act requires that I report and we have ⑦ scrupulously done that. We have twice telephoned some 20 members of the Congress on what we have done and we will file the required written report within the 48-hour rule.

Question: Why didn't you send someone to the Hill to inform us of the decisions you were about to make?

The President: We only ordered these actions at 10 minutes to 6 this evening. Our first obligation was to the Congressional leadership and that was why we invited you here immediately. We will report fully to the Congress in writing. Depending upon what happens tonight, we will do more to keep you informed if necessary.

Representative O'Neill: It is a fact that some of the Congressional leaders were briefed late this afternoon.

Senator Sparkman: Our Committee met this afternoon. We discussed this matter thoroughly and we have unanimously adopted a statement

which condemns the Cambodian seizure of the ship; that expresses support for the President's use of diplomatic means to secure the release of the ship; that we support the President in his exercise of power to effect that release within the framework of the War Powers Act; and that we urged the Cambodians to release the ship.

The President: Thank you, John.

Question: Were the Cambodians given a specific deadline?

Secretary Kissinger: No, because this would let them calculate the timing of any countermeasures we might take. But the UN Secretary General told them in the open cable that we would respond if this ship was not released immediately. I want to emphasize the President's request that you not give out the details of his decisions because this would endanger our Marines and our planned operations. We need the element of surprise, so please don't describe the steps the President has ordered.

Question: Did China cooperate?

Secretary Kissinger: They did what we expected. They kept the note 24 hours and then returned it, saying they couldn't deliver it. We assume they communicated the message. We also gave a copy to the Embassy of Cambodia in Peking. As you know there are no foreign embassies in Phnom Penh except for the North Vietnamese, North Korean's and the Chinese. Obviously, we felt the Chinese were the best channel to use.

Question: When did the time start running in the 48-hour notification requirement?

Phil Buchen: We believe that time started when the ships were interdicted, so we plan to get the report to you by 6:15 a.m. tomorrow. We assume there will be someone there to receive it.

Senator Stennis: You said that your attack on the mainland is solely to protect your Marine operations?

The President: Yes, it is just to neutralize the Cambodian forces, including their aircraft and their ships.

Senator Mansfield: I must express my deep misgivings that we are again attacking the Indochina mainland. I am convinced that the reaction will not be good.

Senator Case: I must point out that although the Case-Church Amend- ③
ment prohibits U. S. military action in Indochina, I disagree with
Senator Mansfield, and I do not believe that the Amendment does apply
to the purpose of rescuing American citizens. I believe this distinction
must be made clear.

Senator Byrd: One last question. Why were the leaders of Congress, ④
the Majority Leader, the Speaker, etc., not consulted about this at
least at the time the decision was still being made? We are being
told only after the fact. You are not required to do this in advance,
but it certainly would be better if we did wait until we were attacked
before hitting the mainland. You will be charged with overreacting and
it would have been better if the leaders of Congress would have been
consulted in advance on this decision.

The President: This is a proper question, Bob. As Commander-in- ⑤
Chief, I have to act to protect our citizens. I acted in a proper
exercise of my authority within the War Powers Act. I did have
within the NSC the advice of the Joint Chief of Staff and my other
advisors. It is my judgment and my understanding of my responsibility
that I had to weigh the risk of doing too little to avoid any danger to
the limited number of Marines going in on the first wave. I did not
want to be criticized for doing too little to protect our initial marine
forces.

Senator Byrd: Let me respectfully press this. I know you are doing ⑥
what you think best and I certainly don't question your authority to do
it, but I want to know why the leaders were not brought in in advance
of your decision?

The President: We have a government of separation of powers. The ⑦
President has the authority to act. I have an obligation to act. We
have lived within the law of the War Powers Act. We may have
differences over judgments and decisions, but I would never forgive
myself if I had let our Marines be attacked by the 2400 Cambodian
soldiers.

Senator Eastland: How much time did you have during this decision-making?

The President: We met at 3:30 this afternoon. We had to decide quickly
and give the signal early enough to provide time for the Marines to move
at first light.

I appreciate your all coming down here and I can assure that we will keep you posted throughout the night. I hope we can all pray for the best result of this operation.

Question: When will the public know?

Secretary Kissinger: DOD will make an announcement at 10:00 p.m.

Representative Rhodes: Mr. President, this operation is well planned, it is well conceived, and it is the right thing to do.

The President: Thank you.

PARTICIPANTS

SENATE

Bob Byrd
Cliff Case
John Eastland
Bob Griffin
John McClellan
Mike Mansfield
High Scott
John Sparkman
John Stennis
Milt Young

HOUSE

Speaker Albert
Bill Broomfield
Al Cederberg
Bob Michel
Thomas Morgan
Tip O'Neill
Mel Price
John Rhodes
Bob Wilson

Invited but regretted

Senator Strom Thurmond
Rep. John McFall
Rep. George Mahon

501

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE

MINUTES

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING
PART I OF III

Date: Thursday, May 15, 1975

Time: 4:02 p.m. - 4:20 p.m.

Place: Cabinet Room, The White House

Subject;   Seizure of American Ship by Cambodian
Authorities

Principals

The President
Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger
Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones
The Director of Central Intelligence William Colby

Other Attendees

State: Deputy Secretary of State Robert Ingersoll

Defense: Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements

WH: Donald Rumsfeld
Robert Hartmann

NSC: Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft
W. Richard Smyser

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE - XGDS

President: Will you tell me where we stand at this time?

Colby: I can give you a report on foreign reaction. I think it would
                 be better if George could give you a wrap-up on our operation.

President: Please go ahead.

Colby: Mr. President, we have no reactions from Communist
                 authorities in Phnom Penh to the U.S. military operation
                 beyond what we had last night. In his statement on Phnom
                 Penh radio at that time, Information Minister Hu Nimm was
                 noticeably defensive in rationalizing the seizure of the vessel.

                 Although he did claim that the MAYAGUEZ was on an intelligence
                 mission, he stated several times that his government had no
                 desire to stage "provocations" and that the MAYAGUEZ had
                 only been halted for "questioning. "

                 In the aftermath of the U.S. military operation, the Thai
                 cabinet today apparently decided to expel a "senior member
                 of the U.S. mission," and to recall the Thai ambassador in
                 Washington for consultations.

                 Thai newspapers today are also urging that the government:

                 -- publicize all agreements between the U.S. and Thailand, and

                 -- immediately close down all U.S. bases in Thailand.

                 Leftist politicians are now holding a rally in Bangkok. They
                 reportedly intend to demand that all U.S. troops leave
                 Thailand within 10 days.

                 The political left apparently believes that the time is right to
                 create a political crisis for the Khukrit government.

                 Organizers of the demonstration plan to move crowds to both
                 the prime minister's office and the U.S. embassy.

                 The Thai military leaders, on the other hand, have privately
                 continued to support the U.S. actions.

TOP SECRET /SENSITIVE - XGDS

In Peking's first reaction to the U.S. military action,
Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien has accused the U.S. of an
"outright act of piracy."

Speaking at a banquet in Peking today, Li said that "when an
American ship invaded Cambodia's territorial waters,
Cambodia took legitimate measures against the ship to safe-
guard her state sovereignty." Li added that "the U.S. went
so far as to make an issue of the matter" and bombed Cambodian
territory and ships.

Li said the American action "should be condemned by world
public opinion."

Hanoi radio has characterized the operation as a "flagrant
act of piracy" which shows that the U.S. still has not "learned
from its defeats in Vietnam and Cambodia."

The new government in Saigon has not commented, but it
can be expected to parrot Hanoi's line.

Soviet media continue to report the events surrounding the
MAYAGUEZ incident from foreign wire services without
editorial comment.

East European commentary remains muted. The Yugoslav
press has even referred to the MAYAGUEZ as a "kidnapped"
U.S. vessel.

The Cuban press has so far treated U.S. actions in a factual
manner, but we have no comment since the U.S. operation
was completed.

A Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman has stated that "a
container ship on open waters must not be subject to seizure"
and that his government viewed the U.S. military action as
"limited."

In most major Western countries there has been little
official reaction.

British and West German press comment has been generally
supportive.

Press reaction from South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia has been favorable.

Ingersoll: Bill Rogers spoke to the OAS Ministers while they were here, including the one from Panama. He said they were very pleased.

President: Jim, I would like to congratulate you and your whole Department for a job well done.

Have we had any report on the damage so far?

Jones: Not yet. We can summarize the claims, but we are not sure that they are accurate. Here is a photograph. It is the first one that has yet been received here. It shows the buildings around the airport before and after they were damaged. We understand that the damage reported on the aircraft was extensive.

President: Which airport was this?

Jones: The airport near Kompong Som, called Ream.

Kissinger: Were any boats sunk?

Jones: Yes, but we don't yet know how many.

We have no Navy reports yet, just the Air Force. We need to survey all the aircraft involved in the operation.

Kissinger: Were the aircraft used land aircraft?

Jones: No, only the CORAL SEA aircraft were used against Kompong Som. There were four waves. The first was armed reconnaissance. They did not expend ordnance. They found the shipping of other countries and did not want to take the risk. The three subsequent waves went against the airport, against the POL facilities, and against support facilities.

We put 240 Marines on the island, in total. We put 40 aboard the ship.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

We lost three helicopters in the operation. The equipment took a lot of battle damage.

Our casualties were 1 killed in action, 1 missing, and 30 wounded. That is considerably lighter than we thought last night.

President: Are all the Marines now on the CORAL SEA or on the HANCOCK?

Jones: They are on the CORAL SEA. We had a reserve of 1,000 on Thailand. But when the ship's crew was returned, we stopped any more Marines going to the island. Then we put in another 80 in order to help the Marines that were there to extricate themselves.

President: I heard that the Marines on the HOLT had gone to the island.

Jones: No, they did not have their full equipment.

Clements: How many helicopters were inoperative?

Jones: We got down to four Air Force helicopters and three from the CORAL SEA. So there were only a few for the Marines who were left there. We thought we might have to keep people overnight on the island. But that was only the impression in Washington. They continued the flow of helicopters and they also used several boats from the destroyer, so that they were able to extricate all the Marines.

Kissinger: How many Cambodians were on the island?

Jones: We do not know, but they were obviously well armed with supplies. They put up a lot of fire against the helicopters.

President: That is probably why they moved the ship to that island from that other one where they had it.

Kissinger: Where did the boat carrying the crew come from?

Jones: From Kompong Som.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE - XGDS

Kissinger: This indicates that the operation was really centrally
               controlled.

Jones: They brought a message that they had been sent out on a
               Thai fishing vessel in order to be returned, and they asked us
               to stop the bombing. We had one or two more runs, but we
               stopped shortly thereafter.

Kissinger: How many aircraft were used altogether?

Jones: About 32 to 40.

Schlesinger: Not the 81 that had been on the carrier.

President: Henry, would you step out for a moment?

               (At this point, the President and the Secretary of State
               stepped out for about 3 minutes. They then returned.)

President: Jim, I would like a full factual report giving a summary and
               chronology of what happened. It should include orders, summary
               results, photographs, etc., and indications of what we did
               when.

               Where is the ship now?

Jones: She is on her way to Singapore. We towed her for some
               distance but then she was able to get up steam and she wanted
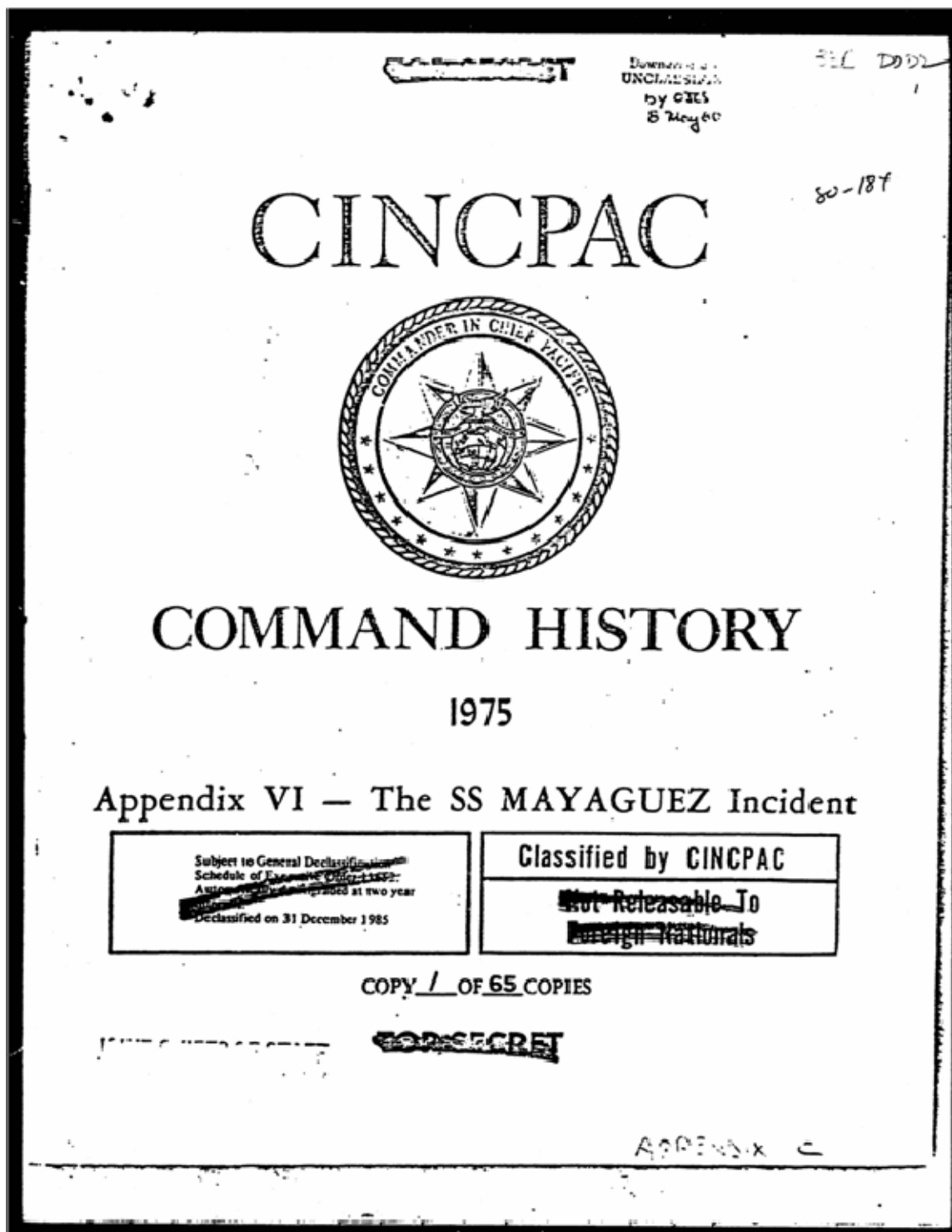   to go to Singapore.

President: It was a job well done. Let us now go on to the next item on
               our agenda.

APPENDIX F

CINPAC COMMAND HISTORY

CINCPAC

COMMAND HISTORY

1975

Appendix VI — The SS MAYAGUEZ Incident

COMMANDER IN CHIEF PACIFIC
COMMAND HISTORY

1975

Appendix VI — The SS MAYAGUEZ Incident

Prepared by the Command History Branch
Office of the Joint Secretary
Headquarters CINCPAC, FPO San Francisco 96610

CAMP H. M. SMITH, HAWAII
1976

i

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDIX VI

THE SS MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT

SECTION I--INTRODUCTION

(U)   The Cambodian seizure of the United States vessel, MAYAGUEZ, on
12 May 1975 was a significant incident viewed in the context of the inter-
national situation when it occurred. Cambodia and Vietnam had just fallen to
communist control the previous month and the PUEBLO incident of 1968 was still
a fresh memory. It was apparent, at the time, to national leadership from the
President on down that this test of United States willpower called for quick,
firm, and decisive action which would help to reaffirm America's determination
in the eyes of her opponents and allies as well as the American public.
Admiral Noel Gayler, Commander in Chief Pacific at the time of the incident,
commented on the successful joint Service recovery operation:[1]

> Cambodian adventurism tested the United States with
> the seizure of the merchant ship MAYAGUEZ on the high seas
> in May. The recovery operation has left no doubt as to our
> resolve and capabilities in that part of the world. Our
> Marines, sailors and airmen again met the challenge.
> Stories of their courage abound - from the Marine who
> directed air strikes while swimming off-shore after his
> helicopter was shot down, to the sailors in the motor
> whaleboat who took on dug-in heavy weapons with small arms,
> to the Air Force pilots who forced their way into the landing
> zones while taking hits.

During the period immediately following the incident, detailed reports
were prepared independently by participants up to and including the Joint
Chiefs of Staff. In addition, every aspect of the incident was subjected to
exhaustive Congressional scrutiny to include a full-scale General Accounting
Office (GAO) investigation, the unclassified findings of which were released
to the public in October 1976. Although these findings were critical of
certain aspects of MAYAGUEZ recovery operations, overall military participation
was described as follows:[2]

----

1. CINCPAC Command History 1975, Vol. I, p. v.
2. The Seizure of the MAYAGUEZ--A Case Study of Crisis Management, Report of
    The Comptroller General of the United States, May 11, 1976, p. 56,
    hereinafter referred to as The Comptroller General MAYAGUEZ Report.

1

• Finally, assembling, under severe time constraints, the various military assets scattered throughout the Pacific area was generally accomplished in an efficient and effective manner.

• Command and control of, and communications between, multiservice assets was established expeditiously. The performance of U.S. Forces was inspiring.

(U)   This monograph will not attempt to recount all the details of the MAYAGUEZ operation already available in existing reports. Instead, it will attempt to tie together loose ends and present an overview of the MAYAGUEZ operation from the CINCPAC unified command level. This overview will stress the important military aspects of the operation to include command and control, intelligence/reconnaissance, and planning and execution. In covering these aspects, further emphasis will be placed on CINCPAC's "lessons learned," which should provide valuable insight, and hopefully foresight, for reference in coping with possible future crisis action situations. As CINCPAC has noted, "...with full benefit of hindsight we could have done a number of things better. Life is like that, and there is no reason we should not acknowledge it."[1]

----

1. CINCPAC 131338Z Feb 76.

2

SECTION II--NOTIFICATION

(C) Cambodia had fallen to the communists on 17 April 1975 and the fall of the Republic of Vietnam followed closely behind on 30 April 1975. On 12 May 1975 the American Embassy in Vientiane advised that the Pathet Lao had moved quickly to exploit the virtual disappearance of the Vientiane side and to exert control over government operations, commercial activities, and movement of persons there. In the wake of these events, most United States Forces had departed the immediate area except for those in Thailand. In the midst of this situation, the MAYAGUEZ incident tested the United States crisis action capabilities.[1]

(U) It was 0718 Zulu (Z) hours on 12 May 1975 when Mr. John Neal of Delta Exploration Company in Jakarta, Indonesia received a "Mayday" (distress) call from the United States merchant ship MAYAGUEZ:[2]

> Have been fired upon and boarded by Cambodian armed forces at 9 degrees 48 minutes north/102 degrees 53 minutes east. Ship is being towed to unknown Cambodian port.

(C) CINCPAC received this information at 0914Z hours 12 May 1975 in a message from the American Embassy, Jakarta. This notification was similarly received by the White House, the National Security Agency (NSA), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Military Command Center (NMCC) at the Pentagon. Based on the _____ message, CINCPAC contacted the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and discussed assets available to reconnoiter the scene of the incident; thus, initial preparations for the MAYAGUEZ operation were begun, pending the outcome of State Department attempts to make contact through diplomatic channels. As the situation developed, diplomatic channels were determined at executive level to be unsatisfactory and military means were employed to recover the MAYAGUEZ and release her crew.[3]

(C) The MAYAGUEZ seizure, which began the chain of events leading to military action, was not a totally isolated incident, lacking any indications as to its possible occurrence. CINCPAC observed that adequate and timely warning was provided]

----

1. CINCPAC Command History 1975, Vol. II, pp. 607, 609, 617.
2. Op. Cit., The Comptroller General MAYAGUEZ Report, p. 89. [All times will be shown in Greenwich Mean or Zulu time; for Cambodian (G) time, add 7 hours; for Hawaii (W) time, subtract 10 hours.]
3. Jakarta 0356/120903Z May 75.

3

SECTION III--COMMAND AND CONTROL

Command Relationships

(the communications aspects of command and control will be discussed in detail later in this section).

In conference, the local on-scene commander, who was Commander, U.S. Support Activities Group/7th Air Force (COMUSSAG/7AF), assumed the responsibility for planning and directing operations to recover the MAYAGUEZ and cause the release of her crew. Based upon this understanding, COMUSSAG/7AF, in his initial planning guidance to subordinate and supporting units, interpreted command and control relationships as follows:[1]

> ...The international implications of this operation make restraint imperative. Complete command and control must be maintained by COMUSSAG/7AF, who will be acting upon direction from the National Military Command Center....

CINCPAC's execution message, authorizing implementation of COMUSSAG/7AF's initial planning guidance, clarified the command and control relationship as it was to apply throughout the MAYAGUEZ operation until its termination on 15 May 1975:[2]

> ...Command and control will be maintained by CINCPAC, who will be acting under direction from JCS (NMCC).

In accordance with this relationship, COMUSSAG/7AF, under CINCPAC's operational command, planned and directed MAYAGUEZ operations on the scene. Air Force and Marine assets were placed under the operational control of, and Naval assets (minus the Marines) supported, COMUSSAG/7AF. Command relationships were again spelled out, using different wording, in COMUSSAG/7AF's final operation plan:[3]

> ...overall control of the operation will be as directed by CINCPAC and approved by the JCS. CINCPAC will have

----

1. COMUSSAG/7AF 131748Z May 75.
2. CINCPAC 132051Z May 75 and 152330Z May 75.
3. COMUSSAG/7AF 141730Z May 75 (EX).

5

147

operational control over all PACOM designated forces.
CINCSAC will have operational control over the B-52 strike
force. COMUSSAG/7AF will act as the coordinating authority
for the operations of supporting forces.

Command relationships are depicted on the following chart.

(U) Although Naval forces committed to the MAYAGUEZ operation were not
under the operational control of COMUSSAG/7AF, it was noted that no requests
made by the local command were denied by these forces. As the Commander in
Chief Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) noted, "the execution requirements for
MAYAGUEZ did not provide sufficient time to prepare and promulgate a detailed
OPORDER..."; however, CINCPACFLT did advise that "unless otherwise directed,
task force units assigned to subject operation in Gulf of Thailand should plan
on operating in support of COMUSSAG/7AF with direct liaison authorized all
concerned." The Commander, Seventh Fleet further passed on CINCPACFLT
instructions for participating task force units to respond to directions and
tasking from COMUSSAG/7AF.[1]

Communications

---

1. Ibid.; CINCPACFLT 131857Z May 75 and 140505Z Jun 75 (EX); COMSEVENFLT
   142326Z May 75.
2. J3 Discussion Topic, undated, Issue: Lessons Learned Recent Contingency
   Operations, for discussion at CINC conference held 14 Aug 75 at LANTCOM.

6

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS
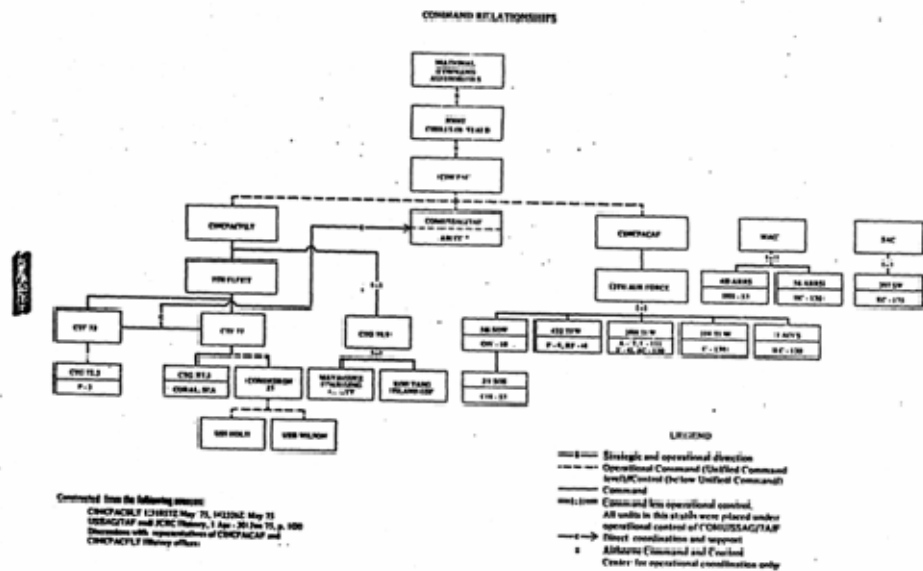
in Hawaii; and COMUSSAG/7AF in Thailand. This arrangement emphasized operational control and real time reporting and information gathering.[1]

(S) The communications conference permitted direct control by Washington decision-makers over events halfway around the world. On the other hand, An example was COMUSSAG/7AF's interpretation of command and control relationships in his initial planning guidance. Furthermore,

(S) The PACOM Required Operational Capabilities for Secure Voice and Data Conferencing and Communications for Remote Force/Joint Task Force Operations, included in the PACOM Command and Control System Master Plan submitted to the JCS on 29 January 1975, recommended use of inherent satellite broadcast capability to satisfy conferencing requirements and proposed that an operational test bed be established in PACOM to resolve operational and technical questions. The experience gained through extensive use during the EAGLE PULL, FREQUENT WIND, and MAYAGUEZ operations led CINCPAC to further emphasize the following requirements:[3]

(S) Tactical communications established between the on-scene commander and subordinate and supporting units during the MAYAGUEZ operation were characterized

---

1. CINCPAC 131338Z Feb 76.
2. Op. Cit., The Comptroller General MAYAGUEZ Report, pp. 33-35; J6/Memo/ 0027-75 of 11 Jun 75, Subj: Lessons Learned-SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island; J3/Memo/00566-75 of 8 Sep 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ & Koh Tang Island Operation.
3. J6/Memo/0027-75 of 11 Jun 75, Subj: Lessons Learned-SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island; CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).

SECRET

8

It was monitored

and patched   Enemy forces could just
as easily have monitored the same net.

                                                         capability did
exist from the ABCCC to USSAG, and to Naval units only, through the

     (S) The Marine Ground Security Force (GSF), landed on Koh Tang Island to
free the MAYAGUEZ crew, lost its   capability in a helicopter crash,
and thus its   Therefore, the GSF
was forced to

     (S) As a result of the
     during the MAYAGUEZ operation, CINCPAC further emphasized the following
requirements:[4]

----

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).
4. Ibid.

9

151

- (U) Communications nets involved in the MAYAGUEZ operation are depicted on the following chart.

(S) In commenting to the JCS on interrelated command and control and communications requirements for further contingency/noncombatant emergency evacuation (NEMVAC) operations, CINCPAC noted that, in the case of the MAYAGUEZ operation,

thus providing a clearer tactical picture to the on-scene commanders. The plot could have easily been remoted to the rear echelon headquarters and the
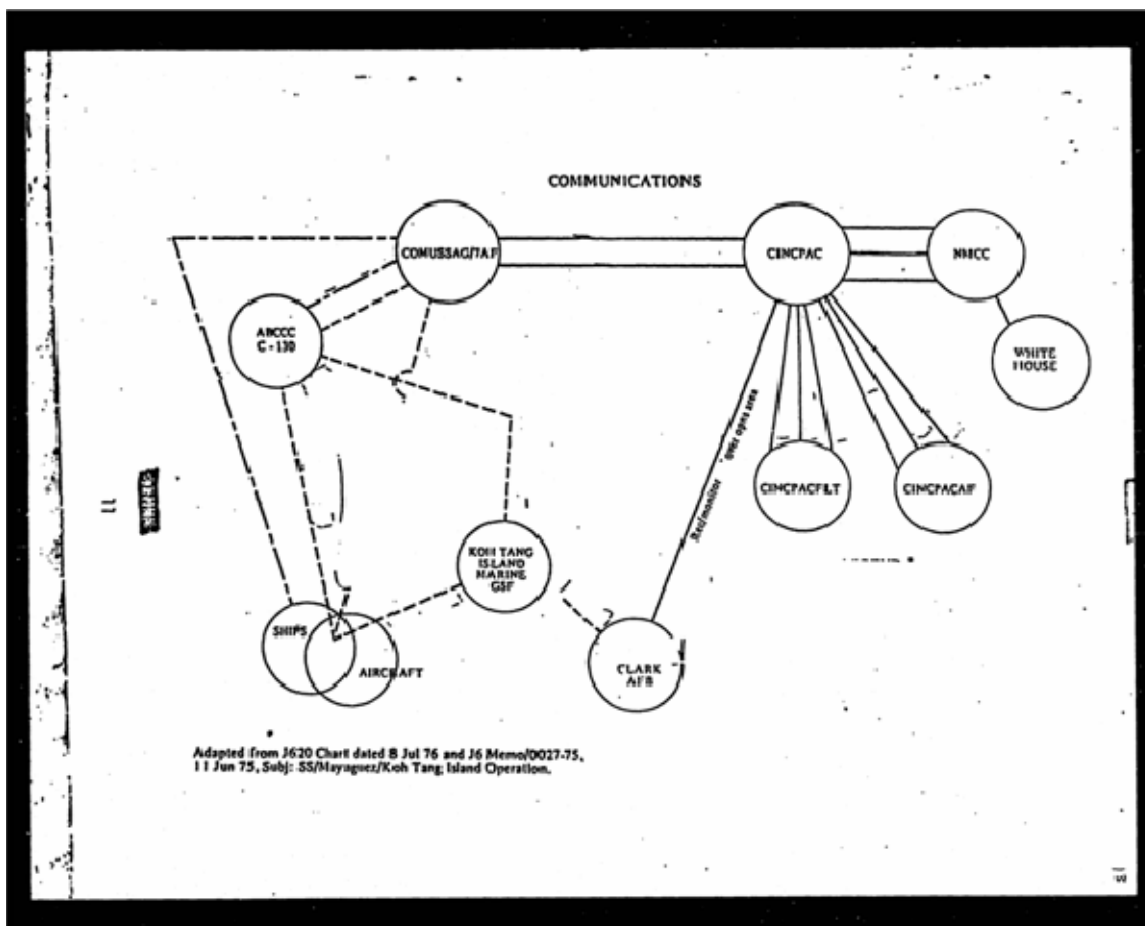
Reporting

(S) The existence of unilateral Service reporting channels to the JCS during the MAYAGUEZ operation permitted the forwarding of conflicting reports, which had to be referred back to CINCPAC for resolution. The primary example of this was casualty reporting, where receipt and release of fragmentary and unverified information at Office of the Secretary of Defense level gave the appearance of inaccurate casualty reporting. This problem was partially related to the nature of the   means of communication in use (for details see communications section), which, lacking specific procedures, allowed for ad hoc inquiries from higher authority and discrepancies between voice and hard copy reporting.[2]

(S) Interface between intelligence and operational reporting was an area that witnessed highly effective innovations as well as need for refinement (for details see communications and intelligence/reconnaissance sections).

(S) In addition to report-related observations found in the communications and intelligence/reconnaissance sections of this monograph, CINCPAC noted, in general, that channels must go through the unified commander to insure coordinated and accurate reporting to all concerned. CINCPAC, realizing that official casualty figures had to be reported through Service channels,

---

1. Ibid.; J6/Memo/0027-75 of 11 Jun 75, Subj: Lessons Learned-SS MAYAGUEZ/ Koh Tang Island Operation.
2. J1/Memo/311-75 of 18 Jul 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation; CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).

10

COMMUNICATIONS

Adapted from J620 Chart dated 8 Jul 76 and J6 Memo/0027-75,
11 Jun 75, Subj: SS/Mayaguez/Koh Tang Island Operation.

153

recommended a change to JCS Publication 6 to provide force status and identity (FORSTAT) casualty reporting from unit level to the unified command to allow monitoring.[1]

---

1. J1/Memo/311-75 of 18 Jul 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation.

12

SECTION IV--INTELLIGENCE/RECONNAISSANCE

(S) Upon notification of the MAYAGUEZ incident, the Deputy Director for Operations, National Military Command Center requested CINCPAC to launch reconnaissance aircraft from U-Tapao, Thailand. This initial request was followed by further guidance:[1]

- CINCPAC provide continuous P-3 surveillance over the Gulf of Siam north of 8 degrees north and east of 101 degrees east, no closer than 12 nautical miles to the Cambodian mainland, islands excluded.

- CINCPAC provide photo coverage of Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, and the islands of Poulo Wai at first satisfactory light, regardless of cloud cover. (The platform was not specified.)

- ___ provide ___ (OLYMPIC MEET) coverage of Poulo Wai at also within the 12 nautical mile restriction.

(S) From this guidance, CINCPAC further instructed CINCPACFLT to report sightings of Cambodian naval units as well as the captured MAYAGUEZ, and obtain photos of Cambodian naval units as feasible. This mission was, in turn, passed to the Commander, Philippine Air Patrol Group (CTG 72.3), who had P-3 aircraft located at his primary base of operations, Cubi Point, Republic of the Philippines, and at his logistic base and refueling stop, U-Tapao Royal Thai Naval Air Station, Thailand. At 0166Z hours, 13 May a P-3 aircraft reported positive identification of the MAYAGUEZ at 9°56' N, 102°58' E.[2]

(S) The platform, mechanics of film processing, and exploitation procedures for photo reconnaissance were not addressed by the JCS, but after a telephone exchange between CINCPAC J2 and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) the DIA provided processing, duplicating, and disseminating instructions to CINCPAC, SAC, and the SAC Reconnaissance Center, with information copies to Air Force

---

1. After Action Report, US Military Operations, SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island, 12-15 May 1975, prepared by the JCS, Tab D, Encl 9, p. 1 (hereinafter referred to as JCS After Action Report); JCS 8233/121944Z May 75.
2. U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, Vol. 102/11/885, Nov 76, p. 94, "'Mayday' for the MAYAGUEZ," by Commander J.A. Messegee, USN (hereinafter referred to as Proceedings); Op. Cit., JCS After Action Report, Tab D, Encl 9, p. 1; CINCPAC 122104Z May 75.

SECRET

13

headquarters, COMUSSAG, CINCPACAF, and the 432d Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) at Udorn, Thailand. The DIA message cited the JCS message as having directed _(OLYMPIC MEET) and :(FACE VALUE) missions against Cambodian targets; the FACE VALUE missions were to be processed and exploited by the 432d TFW at Udorn, while OLYMPIC MEET mission materials were to be delivered to the _| The remainder of the DIA message named specific exploitation objectives, but did not address the JCS-directed P-3 reconnaissance.[1]

(S) This omission was apparently resolved (possibly through operational channels) because, approximately three hours after the DIA message, CINCPAC J2 directed COMUSSAG, CINCPACAF, and CINCPACFLT to follow the DIA instructions for processing and distributing the FACE VALUE and OLYMPIC MEET missions. CINCPAC also directed CINCPACFLT to forward unprocessed P-3 mission imagery to the 432d Reconnaissance Technical Squadron (RTS) at Udorn for initial processing and rapid readout. The 432d RTS was to prepare the Initial Photo Interpretation Report (IPIR) and dispatch it to specified addressees as "Special USN P-3 Coverage." A duplicate positive was to be sent to the Fleet Air Intelligence Service Center (FAISC) Pacific, and the original negative to Fleet Intelligence Center Pacific in Hawaii.[2]

(S) Because the Navy P-3 unit at U-Tapao, Thailand had not been an addressee on the CINCPAC message, COMUSSAG retransmitted the message to the U-Tapao-based P-3 unit, but apparently too late. A little more than six hours after the dispatch of the CINCPAC message, COMUSSAG was informed that the first P-3 film had been sent to the FAISC Pacific at Cubi Point, Philippines for processing.[3]

(S) Subsequent imagery was handled as instructed, however, and, when the operation to recover the MAYAGUEZ and her crew was authorized, CINCPAC provided film handling instructions for fleet tactical aerial photo reconnaissance operations. When IPIRs of Koh Tang Island indicated possible helicopter crash imagery, CINCPAC directed COMUSSAG to provide the most recent photography to the Commander Task Unit 72.3.5 (P-3s) at U-Tapao for possible resumption of Marine personnel recovery operations. Throughout the MAYAGUEZ operation, flash precedence COMPASS LINK was employed. Expedited Armed Forces Courier Service, requested by CINCPAC on 13 May 1975,

---

1. J23 HistSum May 75, with 12 attached msgs, second of which was JCS 8223/ 121944Z May 75; DIA (DC-SC) 05216/122108Z May 75 (BOM).
2. CINCPAC 130239Z May 75.
3. COMUSSAG/7AF 131253Z May 75, which cited several undated phonecons and COMUSSAG INCR 130755Z May 75.

14

was cancelled on 20 May, and on 21 May CINCPAC directed CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF, and COMUSSAG to revert to normal film handling procedures.[1]

(S) With the photo reconnaissance platform specified as RF-4C, CINCPAC instructed COMUSSAG/7AF to provide photo coverage of Phnom Penh, Sihanoukville, Hon Panjang Island (09°18' N, 103°28' E), and the island groups in the vicinity of 09°58' N, 102°53' E (Poulo Wai). Flights over Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville were restricted to a minimum altitude of 6,000 feet, while flights over the islands were restricted to a minimum of 4,500 feet. The Essential Elements of Information (EEI) included merchant ships, naval craft, and paratroop landing/drop zones. After the MAYAGUEZ was located and under observation, CINCPAC requested initial imagery of Koh Tang Island and daily coverage until after the execution of contemplated recovery operations. Flights in the vicinity of Koh Tang Island were restricted to a minimum altitude of 6,500 feet. The EEI now included:[2]

- Pier facilities.

- Gun emplacements.

- Fortifications.

- Small boat locations.

- Troop concentrations.

- Evidence of ship/shore personnel movement to/from MAYAGUEZ.

- One-time readout of building locations/helicopter landing areas.

(S) Photo reconnaissance instructions were subsequently amended, as required, and included RF-4C coverage following each tactical air strike in support of recovery operations as well as Navy missions over the Kompong Som area. In both cases the minimum altitude restriction of 6,500 feet applied.[3]

(TS) In the midst of this reconnaissance activity, the location of the MAYAGUEZ crew was of crucial importance to operational decisions. The

---

1. J23 HistSum May 75; CINCPAC 130241Z May 75, 142145Z May 75, 152333Z May 75, 161511Z May 75, 162226Z May 75, 200037Z May 75, and 210113Z May 75.
2. CINCPAC 122137Z May 75 and 132346Z May 75.
3. CINCPAC 140325Z May 75, 142110Z May 75, 150040Z May 75, and 150045Z May 75.

SECRET

15

above-listed EEI included the requirement to report evidence of personnel movement to/from the MAYAGUEZ and, in conjunction with preliminary actions to isolate Koh Tang Island and the MAYAGUEZ, the JCS emphasized that:[1]

> It is particularly important to get maximum information on any outgoing boat to determine if there are Americans aboard and to report such when requesting authority to sink, although this will be difficult to accomplish. Deck loading probably will be required on the small boats as they did in taking personnel, believed to be Americans, from the ship to the island.

(S) The knowledge that personnel, believed to be Americans, had been taken from the MAYAGUEZ to Koh Tang Island was based on P-3 aircraft (LY499) reports that one gunboat and one tugboat were observed along side the MAYAGUEZ and that personnel were being transferred from the MAYAGUEZ to the tugboat. The P-3 further reported that the gunboat and tug with personnel on board departed the MAYAGUEZ heading toward shore, and that the personnel seated on deck with heads on knees appeared to be Caucasian. COMUSSAG/7AF followed the progress of this movement:[2]

Time	Observation
131018Z May	Boat which had been tied to starboard side of MAYAGUEZ has started to move toward the island with a lot of people on board.
131024Z May	Small fishing-type vessel which was tied to port side of MAYAGUEZ is now moving toward island. The boat appears to have Caucasian personnel on board....
131033Z May	Ground fire was received by JUMBO 01 as he made low visual reconnaissance pass near the island. No hits. Personnel are disembarking on the island.
131115Z May	Report from KING 22, HC-130. Two small boats offloading personnel on island and they are moving toward the interior of the island.

----

1. JCS 9376/131905Z May 75.
2. PATRON FOUR 131024Z May 75; CTG 72.3 131050Z May 75; COMUSSAG/7AF 131105Z May 75, 131115Z May 75, 131118Z May 75, 131135Z May 75, and 131245Z May 75.

131227Z May   Summary of situation. The MAYAGUEZ is still in the
water. All personnel appear to have been transferred
to the island...both small boats are at the island....

(U)   The above indications, which led to the conclusion that the MAYAGUEZ
crew was being held on Koh Tang Island, prompted the actions taken to isolate
the island and the MAYAGUEZ. The objective was to prevent the crew and ship
from being taken to mainland Cambodia, thus avoiding a situation similar to
the PUEBLO affair of 1968.[1]

(S)   The only other indication as to the possible location of the
MAYAGUEZ crew during the incident, prior to their release, came about 0103Z
hours 14 May, when a P-3 observed a "...fishing boat, with possible Caucasians
huddled in the bow..." heading from Koh Tang Island toward the Cambodian
mainland. Other United States Forces in the area at that time, which had also
observed the boat, included four A-7, two F-4, one C-130, two F-111, and one
KC-135.[2]

(S)   The flight of A-7s from the 347th TFW was directed to orbit and
maintain contact with what they described as "...a fishing vessel of approxi-
mately 40 foot length with approximately 30-40 people of undetermined race
aboard, seated on deck." They remained on station for two hours and tracked
the vessel until it entered the harbor around Kompong Som and docked at 0315Z
hours 14 May. At the same time, the flight of F-4s from the 388th TFW
reported observing the A-7s attempting to impede the progress of a boat
carrying 30-40 people on deck "...thought possible to be Caucasians...." The
F-4s were forced to leave the area early to refuel, but not before they had
attempted to turn the boat by firing in front of it. COMUSSAG/7AF reported
that "...one thirty foot craft with approximately 40 people aboard..." was
maintaining course toward Kompong Som harbor in spite of attempts to turn it
by firing in front of it and making multiple CBU-30 (riot control agent)
passes over it. This boat "...was not taken under direct attack because of
the probability of Americans being aboard...."[3]

(S)   In summary, the MAYAGUEZ crew was not positively identified until
they came alongside the USS WILSON in a Thai fishing boat about 0308Z on
15 May during the assault on Koh Tang Island. The balance of indications
favoring the existence of at least some of the crew remaining on the island

----

1. <u>Op. Cit.</u>, JCS After Action Report, p. 1.
2. PATRON FOUR 140140Z May 75.
3. 347TFW 140707Z May 75; 388TFW 140355Z May 75, 140535Z May 75, 140550Z
   May 75; PATRON FOUR 140242Z May 75, 140323Z May 75; USSAG/7AF 140235Z
   May 75; <u>Op. Cit.</u>, JCS After Action Report, p. 2.

17

was weighted by "...an intelligence source of higher classification..." which indicated that the Khmer Communists intended to take them to Koh Tang Island. The subsequent Koh Tang Island phase of the MAYAGUEZ operation was based on this conclusion.[1]

(U) On the afternoon of 14 May Marine Major Randall Austin, who led the assault on Koh Tang Island, conducted an aerial reconnaissance of the island in a U.S. Army U-21 aircraft, but he noted, "unfortunately, we were limited to a minimum altitude of 6,000 feet and could not see the necessary detail." This restriction was apparently locally established. Evidence leading to this conclusion can be found in Navy Commander J.A. Messegee's (CTG 72.3) recollections of the initial P-3 reconnaissance to locate the MAYAGUEZ:[2]

* * * * * *

In addition to no air cover, we also were concerned about the antiaircraft (AA) armament on the Cambodian gunboats, inasmuch as we had lost a P-3 to this type of boat during the Vietnam War. Although our best intelligence indicated the boats' heaviest weapons were 20mm, one publication indicated they had 40mm. This discrepancy caused me to set a 6,000-foot minimum altitude restriction on our aircraft when in the vicinity of a possible gunboat and to require a one-mile minimum offset. We were to learn that these restrictions did not hamper our ability to visually monitor gunboat movements, except during periods of low cloudiness. At these minimums, however, we could not discern specific details, such as the lettering on the bow and stern of the MAYAGUEZ.

(U) Commander Messegee went on to say, however, that he later directed passes as low as 300 feet, and there was no indication that a 6,000-foot minimum remained in effect for P-3s beyond the initial sortie cited.[3]

(S) Also important was the need for accurate information on the enemy situation, both on Koh Tang Island and on the Cambodian mainland. CINCPAC observed that, to this end, photo reconnaissance provided little order of

---

1. CINCPAC 131338Z Feb 76; PATRON FOUR 150258Z May 75 and 150327Z May 75.
2. NAVY TIMES, 27 Aug 75, p. 15, "The Assault on Koh Tang"; Draft narrative of interview by Colonel Savoy with Major Austin, undated, Subj: Koh Tang Assault/Operation MAYAGUEZ; USSAG/7AF & JCRC History, 1 Apr-30 Jun 1975, dated 22 Aug 75, p. 91; Op. Cit., Proceedings, p. 94.
3. Op. Cit., Proceedings, p. 95.

battle (OB) information on the island because of the dense jungle cover. Photo reconnaissance by _____ was not timely enough for use in such a fast-moving situation. As noted above, the Marine GSF commander's visual reconnaissance proved unsatisfactory to obtain OB information, and_ . . . _____ collection resources provided no OB intelligence due to a _____

(S) Intelligence shortly after the fall of Cambodia (17 April 1975) reported the existence of 18-20 people on the island at that time. IPAC disseminated this information by an intelligence spot report (SPOTREP) on 13 May. In a second SPOTREP, following closely behind the first, IPAC estimated the maximum of one Khmer Communist company (90-100 men) reinforced with a heavy weapons squad to be on the island; however, this report apparently did not reach the Marine GSF commander prior to the assault on the island, although it did reach the transporting helicopter commander and others. According to Major J.B. Hendricks, Operations Officer of the Second Battalion of the Ninth Marine Regiment (2/9), from which the Koh Tang Island assault force was drawn, their briefings informed them "...that there were 20-30 Khmer Rouge irregulars on the island, possibly reinforced by whatever naval support personnel that were there associated with the gunboats sighted in the area." A DIA appraisal which appeared in the JCS after action report on the incident estimated approximately 150-200 Khmer Communists on the island at the onset of the operation; however, there was no indication that this specific appraisal was generally available prior to the assault.[2]

(S) Available maps were considered insufficient to plan an amphibious assault or direct naval gunfire in support of the Koh Tang Island phase of the MAYAGUEZ operation. Topographic maps at 1:50,000 or 1:100,000 scale did not extend to the island. The current nautical chart of the island was approximately 1:240,000 scale and there was a Joint Operations Graphic (JOG) at 1:250,000 scale. Standard Naval combat charts were only produced for high priority or training areas; however, other limited areas could have been mapped by the Defense Mapping Agency in 48 hours, exclusive of shipping time, for an amphibious assault.[3]

(S) During the MAYAGUEZ operation the use of intelligence collection media for timely operational reporting (see also communications section) proved an important source of U.S. force data.

----

1. CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).
2. Op. Cit., Proceedings, p. 104, and JCS After Action Report, Tab B, pp. 1-2; COMIPAC 131823Z May 75 and 132144Z May 75; CINCPAC 131338Z Feb 76.
3. J3/Memo/00566-75 of 8 Sep 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation; CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).

19

161

From there, CINCPAC received them via operational communications, at times well ahead of COMUSSAG/7AF voice reports. There was some difficulty correlating operations and intelligence reports because of this time differential.[1]

(S) As a result of experience gained from the MAYAGUEZ operation, CINCPAC directed a feedback system to ensure acknowledgement of critical intelligence by commanders directly concerned, and further emphasized:[2]

●

● The need for accurate photos, charts, and maps of the area for Naval gunfire, close air and assault support forces.

● The need to maintain tactical reconnaissance forces in vital areas to provide timely coverage in fast-moving situations.

● The need for COMPASS LINK or a similar system to ___ |to Washington, theater commanders, and for possible press releases.

●

● The need to develop procedures to rapidly introduce photography from various sources, such as P-3, into other reconnaissance distribution systems in the immediate area of operations.

---

1. J6/Memo/0027-75 of 11 Jun 75, Subj: Lessons Learned-SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation.
2. J3 Discussion Topic, undated, Issue: Lessons Learned Recent Contingency Operations, for discussion at CINC conference held 14 Aug 75 at LANTCOM; CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).

SECRET

20

SECTION V--PLANNING AND EXECUTION

Planning

(S)   As CINCPAC's on-scene commander during the MAYAGUEZ operation, COMUSSAG/7AF was tasked to develop, submit for approval, and execute a multi-Service air, air assault, and surface plan for the recovery of the MAYAGUEZ and an assault on Koh Tang Island in little over 16 hours. Time constraints did not provide sufficient time for detailed operation orders.[1]

(S)   The initial operational concept involved use of the nearest available assets, Air Force security police. They were to make a helicopter assault directly on to the MAYAGUEZ at first light on 14 May; however, as the situation developed, incoming Marines replaced the security police in what was planned to be a simultaneously executed two-phase operation to recover the MAYAGUEZ and release her crew, supported by air strikes on mainland Cambodia.[2]

(S)   Actions taken at the direction of the JCS in support of the evolving operational concept included:[3]

> • CINCPAC move all available helicopter assets in Thailand to U-Tapao.

> • CINCPAC move 75 USAF security police from Nakhon Phanom to U-Tapao.

> • CINCPAC move two reinforced platoons of Marines from Cubi Point to U-Tapao via MAC airlift.

> • CINCPAC place one Okinawa-based Marine battalion on advanced deployability posture for movement to U-Tapao via MAC airlift.

> • CSAF task MAC to provide appropriate support to CINCPAC as required and move appropriate MAC airlift to Kadena AB in preparation to lift Okinawa-based Marines.

---

1. J5/Memo/00131-75 of 17 Jul 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation.
2. USSAG/7AF and JCRC History, 1 Apr-30 Jun 1975, dated 22 Aug 75, pp. 87-89.
3. JCS 9179/131610Z May 75.

(S) Based on these JCS instructions, CINCPAC further tasked COMUSSAG/7AF to move the helicopter assets and security police in Thailand to U-Tapao; CINCPACFLT to move the Marines from Cubi Point and Okinawa to U-Tapao; and CINCPACAF to preposition the required airlift in Okinawa. In addition, the following taskings had already been directed:[1]

- USS CORAL SEA [CVA-43] and escorts (TG 77.5) from the vicinity of Indonesia (about 950 miles away) to the vicinity of Kompong Som.

- USS HOLT, Destroyer Escort (DE-1074), and USS VEGA from about 100 miles off the Philippine coast (southwest of Subic Bay) to the scene of the incident.

- USS WILSON, Guided-Missile Destroyer (DDG-7), enroute from Kaohsiung, Republic of China, bound for Subic Bay, Republic of the Philippines to the vicinity of Koh Tang Island.

- USS OKINAWA, enroute to Okinawa, return to the Philippines to reconstitute an Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) (USS OKINAWA, USS DULUTH, USS BARBOUR COUNTY, and USS MT. VERNON) and prepare to proceed to the scene. (This unit was not deployed.)

(S) The essence of COMUSSAG/7AF's initial operational concept was as follows:[2]

- Arrive on station at first light, 2300Z 13 May/ 0600G 14 May.

- Effect recovery of the ship and, if possible, the ship's crew.

- USAF tactical aircraft air-drop riot control agents (RCA) on the ship to immobilize any personnel on board.

- Use all CH-53 helicopter assets available in Thailand and all but two of the available HH-53 assets.

---

1. Op. Cit., JCS After Action Report, Tab D, Encl 9, p. 1; The Comptroller General MAYAGUEZ Report, pp. 36-38; and Proceedings, pp. 97, 108; CINCPAC 131737Z May 75.
2. COMUSSAG/7AF 131748Z May 75.

22

• At ten minute intervals, in a single helo-lift, offload, from a hover, 125 USAF security police, 2 explosive ordnance personnel, 2 paramedics, and 1 Army captain interpreter onto the MAYAGUEZ.

(S) During the deployment of helicopters and 100 USAF security police from Nakhon Phanom to U-Tapao, which began at 1300Z hours 13 May, one CH-53 crashed because of mechanical failure, killing 18 security police and 5 crew members.[1]

(S) At 2051Z hours 13 May, CINCPAC directed COMUSSAG/7AF to modify the concept by substituting USMC Ground Security Force (GSF) personnel for the USAF security police, and emphasized that command and control would be maintained by CINCPAC. No execute order was issued.[2]

(TS) At 0645Z hours 14 May the JCS notified CINCPAC:[3]

Higher authority has directed that all necessary preparations be made for potential execution early on the 15th to seize the MAYAGUEZ, occupy Koh Tang Island, conduct B-52 strikes against the port of Kompong Som and Ream Airfield, and sink all Cambodian small craft in target areas.

(TS) CINCPAC was now tasked to plan for and execute, when directed, the following operations:[4]

• USS HAROLD E. HOLT seize SS MAYAGUEZ using ships company and or augmenting Marines at U-Tapao.

• Occupy Koh Tang Island with Marine forces at U-Tapao supported by Air Force helo assets and tactical air and naval gunfire support as available and required.

• Sink all Cambodian small craft in the target areas of Koh Tang, Poulo Wai, Kompong Som, and Ream.

(TS) CINCSAC was tasked to conduct conventional B-52 strikes against the port of Kompong Som and Ream Airfield from Guam.[5]

---

1. USSAG/7AF & JCRC History, 1 Apr-30 Jun 1975, dated 22 Aug 75, p. 88.
2. CINCPAC 132051Z May 75.
3. JCS 1109/140645Z May 75 (EX).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

23

(TS) CINCPAC then tasked COMUSSAG/7AF to provide the detailed plans required by the JCS by 1300Z hours 14 May. CINCPAC further specified that, in planning, maximum emphasis should be placed on use of the USS CORAL SEA for close air support and minimum reliance on the availability of Thai-based strategic and tactical air. Although not mentioned, this specification was probably in deference to Thai sensitivities; however, as the situation actually evolved, this specification was not adhered to.[1]

(TS) During the new planning phase, participating units provided input to the plan that was finally submitted. There was general agreement on the need for simultaneously boarding the MAYAGUEZ and helo assaulting Koh Tang Island; however, views differed on the method for boarding the MAYAGUEZ. CINCPACFLT's concept, which was finally executed, was to transfer the boarding party by helicopter to the USS HOLT. The Marine task force commander (CTF 79.9) and COMUSSAG/7AF initially envisioned inserting the boarding party by helicopter directly onto the MAYAGUEZ in a manner similar to COMUSSAG/7AF's previous concept (see page 23). The concept submitted in COMUSSAG/7AF's final plan agreed with CINCPACFLT on the method for boarding the MAYAGUEZ; but, in an apparent oversight in the employment paragraph to the same plan, insertion on the MAYAGUEZ was specified to be by helicopter. CINCPAC approved the final plan, subject to the boarding party boarding from the USS HOLT and clarification that supporting strategic air B-52D air strikes were to be as directed by the JCS. CINCPAC directed that the Marines be put aboard the HOLT and the HOLT brought alongside the MAYAGUEZ because it was unknown if any Cambodians were on the MAYAGUEZ. It was simpler, with fewer risks, to board the MAYAGUEZ from the HOLT than from helicopters.[2]

(TS) The following were the key elements of the final operational concept developed to recover the SS MAYAGUEZ and influence the outcome of U.S. initiatives to secure the release of the ship's crew:[3]

- Begin a simultaneous two-phase assault at sunrise 15 May local time (approximately 2300Z 14 May 1975).

- Using eight USAF CH/HH-53 helicopters, execute a combat assault on Koh Tang Island, with 175 Marines in the initial wave, subsequent buildup to a total of 625 Marines on the island, and rescue members of the SS MAYAGUEZ that may be found there.

----

1. CINCPAC 140750Z May 75.
2. CINCPACFLT 141254Z May 75; CTF 79.9 141400Z May 75; COMUSSAG 141515Z May 75; CINCPAC 142112Z May 75 and 131338Z Feb 76.
3. COMUSSAG/7AF 141730Z May 75 (EX).

• Using three USAF helicopters, insert 48 Marines, 12 USN/MSC personnel, and explosive ordnance team and a Cambodian linguist on the USS HOLT, close with the SS MAYAGUEZ, and board and secure her.

• Close air support and area coverage against all Cambodian small craft would be provided by USAF and USN tactical air. Naval gunfire support would be available, and B-52 strikes or Naval tactical air would be directed against possible reinforcing mainland Cambodian targets.

(S) Subsequent operations followed this concept closely, with tactical air from the USS CORAL SEA being substituted for B-52s in the mainland strikes.[1]

(S) Experience gained in planning for the MAYAGUEZ operation highlighted the need to maintain and follow adequate, current crisis action procedures in responding to quick-breaking situations. Realizing the impracticality of attempting to prepare explicit plans for every possible crisis situation, and the fact that sufficient planning time would hardly ever be available, CINCPAC observed that those options most likely to be executed should be clearly identified early in the planning process to prevent subordinate commands from "spinning their wheels," planning for options that had little likelihood of being executed. Overall, the requirement for U.S. military assets worldwide to be strategically mobile and instantly responsive was emphasized.[2]

(S) Observing the interrelated plans and operations process, CINCPAC stressed the need to increase the number of joint incident exercises with more imaginative and realistic scenarios, commencing with PACOM Command Post Exercises (CPXs), moving, with JCS concurrence, to higher-level politico-military games (possibly inter-departmental), and then frequent, full-fledged exercises with force participation.[3]

Execution

The MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation

(S) The operation began with the first insertion of Marines on Koh Tang Island at about 2255Z 14 May (0555G 15 May) and the landing of the boarding

---

1. Op. Cit., JCS After Action Report, Tab A, p. 2.
2. J5/Memo/00131-75 of 17 Jul 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation.
3. CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).

party on the USS HAROLD E. HOLT at about 2305Z 14 May (0605G 15 May). Although the USS HOLT met no opposition, and the boarding party was in complete control of the MAYAGUEZ within about two hours (0128Z 15 May), the Marine GSF and transporting USAF helicopters met fierce opposition from the beginning. Their ordeal lasted about 14 hours (last Marines extracted at about 1310Z 15 May). The MAYAGUEZ crew had been identified as safe aboard the USS WILSON within about 4 hours (0308Z 15 May) after the initial assault on the island; however, because of the strong enemy opposition encountered on the island, reinforcements were required to stabilize the situation and successfully extract the Marines.[1]

(S)   During the initial insertion of Marines on Koh Tang Island, concern for the safety of the MAYAGUEZ crew, believed to be on the island, precluded landing zone preparation by air strikes or naval gunfire. Even after confirmation of the crew's recovery, fast A-7 Forward Air Controllers (FACs) were unable to pinpoint locations of friendly units and suppress enemy fire because of the confines of, and confusing situation on, the battlefield. It was not until 0930Z 15 May that two OV-10 "Nail" slow FACs, with loitering ability, were on station to pinpoint friendly positions for effective close air support. Also, it was not until 0735Z 15 May that the first helicopter was able to recover to the CORAL SEA rather than return to U-Tapao (helicopters used were a mix of HH-53 air-refuelable "Jolly Green," and CH-53 non-air-refuelable "Knife" aircraft).[2]

(S)   In summary, the Koh Tang Island phase of the MAYAGUEZ operation involved the insertion of 231 Marines and subsequent evacuation of 227 (there were three missing in action and one killed in action left on the island) in the face of severe enemy fire. A total of 15 USMC, USAF, and USN personnel were killed in action, 49 wounded in action, and 3 Marines missing in action. Participating USAF helicopters incurred three combat losses, four were severely damaged, and six received minor damage.[3]

(S)   As a result of the experience gained from executing the Koh Tang Island phase of the MAYAGUEZ operation, CINCPAC made the following additional observations relative to the means available to support the assault:[4]

---

1. Assault on Koh Tang, DCS/Plans and Operations, HQ PACAF, 23 Jun 75, pp. 23, 1-1, 1-3; PATRON FOUR 150327Z May 75; COMUSSAG/7AF 150215Z May 75.
2. Assault on Koh Tang, DCS/Plans and Operations, HQ PACAF, 23 Jun 75, pp. 2, 4, 18, 28, 29, 1-2.
3. Ibid., USSAG/7AF & JCRC History, 1 Apr-30 Jun 1975, dated 22 Aug 75, p. 99.
4. J3/Memo/00566-75 of 8 Sep 75, Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ/Koh Tang Island Operation; CINCPAC 191623Z Jun 75 (EX).

• Helicopter availability dictated the size and composition of forces; thus, the initial insertion was marginal in size, and rapid buildup ashore was not possible due to limited lift capability. Once the CORAL SEA was within 10 miles of the island, and shuttle distance was reduced, adequate support was available for the extraction phase. As we approach reduced force levels in the theater, particular attention must be paid to airmobile support from all services which provides flexibility to force composition.

• Troop lift helicopters should be air refuelable and equipped with fire preventive foam in external fuel tanks, as well as other hardening measures (losses were greater among CH-53s).

• We should use helicopters and low speed FACs to coordinate tactical air assets whenever the tactical environment permits.

Supportive Air Strikes Against the Cambodian Mainland

(S) Air strikes in support of the MAYAGUEZ operation were conducted against mainland Cambodian targets as directed by the JCS, the final decisions resting with higher authority. Cyclic strikes from the USS CORAL SEA against targets in the Kompong Som area were scheduled with first time-on-target about 0045Z 15 May, which closely coincided with the recovery of the MAYAGUEZ. In the midst of the initial execution of the operation, a Foreign Broadcast Information Service report out of Bangkok quoted a Cambodian Government press release to the effect that they intended to release the MAYAGUEZ and crew. This was being discussed by CINCPAC and the NMCC when, about 0044Z 15 May, word was received from the White House to cancel the CORAL SEA strike; however, by 0052Z 15 May word was received to again proceed with the CORAL SEA strikes as planned. The first wave did not expend any ordnance. Then, right after the MAYAGUEZ had been searched and found empty, CINCPAC received information from an unknown Cambodian station saying, "Let the Americans go. We do not want to become prisoners ourselves." This supported the belief that at least some Americans could still be on Koh Tong Island, and shortly after this, the second wave of CORAL SEA aircraft arrived over the mainland to attack Ream Airfield. By 0308Z 15 May the release of the MAYAGUEZ crew had been confirmed and at 0329Z 15 May CINCPAC reported to the NMCC that the crew members had told the WILSON personnel that as a "condition for release they promised air strikes would cease." CINCPAC now queried the JCS as to whether

or not the third wave should continue on course. The Chairman, JCS discussed this with the Secretary of Defense, and the third and final strike was directed and carried out.[1]

(S)   Finally, at 0455Z 15 May, the JCS notified all participants in the MAYAGUEZ operation:[2]

> Immediately cease all offensive operations against Khmer Republic related to seizure of MAYAGUEZ. Disengage and withdraw all forces from operation area as soon as possible consistent with safety/self-defense.

(S)   CINCPAC noted that "...the threat of bombing of the Cambodian mainland did, in fact, influence the Cambodian's decision to release the crew..." as was verified by the captain of the MAYAGUEZ.[3]

---

1. JCS Report, Strike Operations Against Mainland Targets During Operations to Recover SS MAYAGUEZ and Crew, dated 19 May 1975.
2. JCS 2396/150455Z May 75.
3. CINCPAC 131338Z Feb 76.

SECTION VI--SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

(U)   The following are additional references which, though not cited, helped to provide the full breadth of perspective necessary to write this monograph.

Carlile, Donald E., LTC, USA, "The MAYAGUEZ Incident--Crisis Management," Military Review, Vol. LVI, No. 10, October 1976, pp. 3-14.

Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet, Command History of the Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet, 1 January 1975-31 December 1975, Makalapa, Hawaii, 7 September 1976. (SECRET)

Headquarters, 1st Battalion, 4th Marines, 3rd Marine Division (-)(Rein), FMF, After Action Report, Recovery of the SS MAYAGUEZ, 12 November 1975. (CONFIDENTIAL)

Headquarters, Pacific Air Force, History of Pacific Air Forces, 1 July 1974-31 December 1975, Vol. I, Hickam AFB, Hawaii:Office of PACAF History, 30 July 1976. (TOP SECRET)

Rowan, Roy, The Four Days of MAYAGUEZ, New York:W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1975.

Smith, James E., LTC, USAF, "The MAYAGUEZ Incident," a case study submitted to the faculty of the Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, April 1976. Defense Supply Agency, Defense Documentation Center file number ADC006284. (SECRET)

U.S. House of Representatives, Seizure of the MAYAGUEZ, Part I, Hearings before the Committee on International Relations and its Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs, 94th Congress, First Session, May 14 and 15, 1975. Washington:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975.
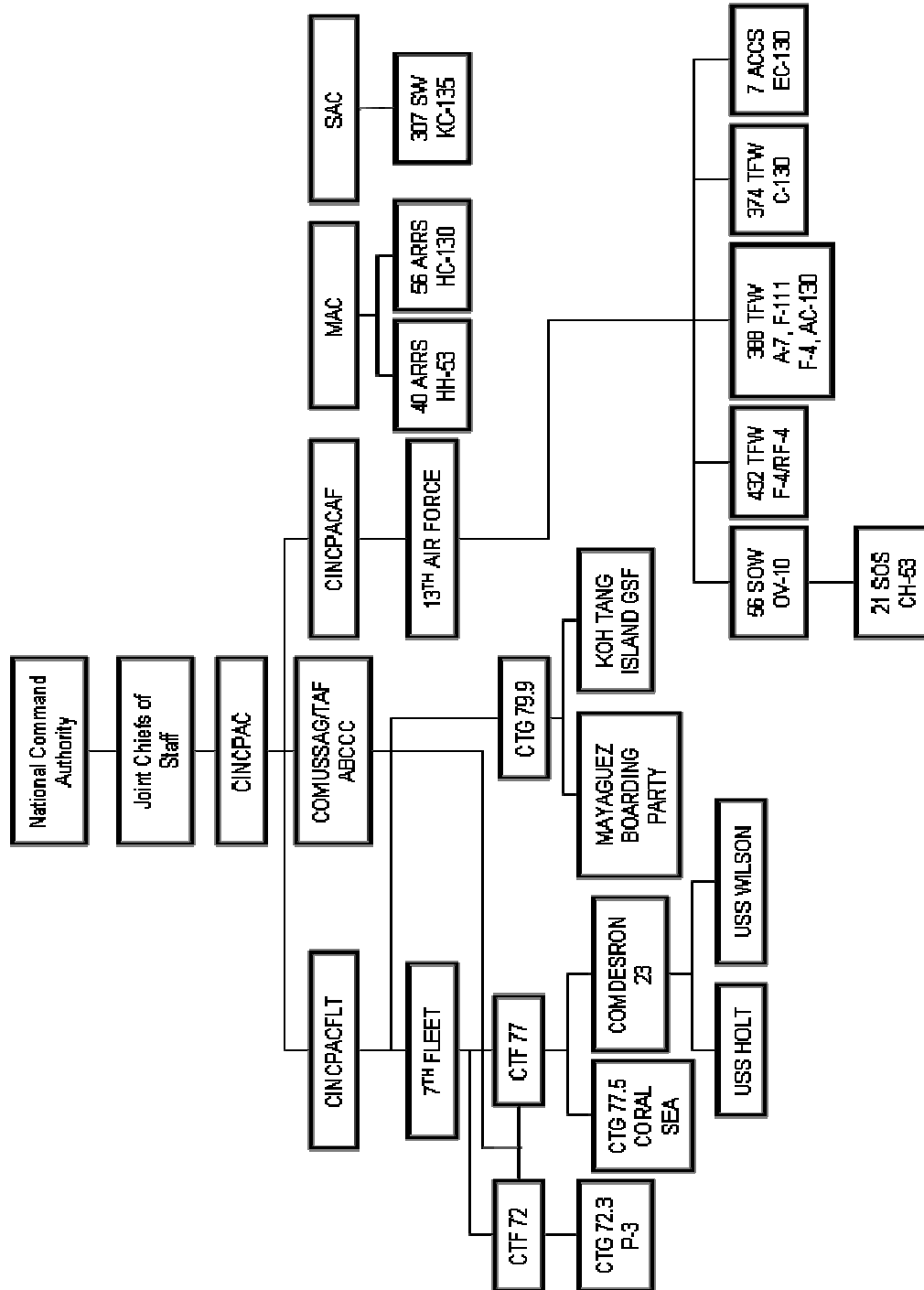
U.S. House of Representatives, Seizure of the MAYAGUEZ, Part II, Hearings before the Subcommittee on International Political and Military Affairs of the Committee on International Relations, 94th Congress, First Session, June 19 and 25, and July 25, 1975. Washington:U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

APPENDIX G

Command Relationships

- National Command Authority
- Joint Chiefs of Staff
- CINCPAC
  - COMUSSAG/TAF ABCCC
    - CTG 79.9
      - KOH TANG ISLAND GSF
      - MAYAGUEZ BOARDING PARTY
  - CINCPACFLT
    - 7TH FLEET
      - CTF 77
        - CTG 77.5 CORAL SEA
        - COMDESRON 23
          - USS HOLT
          - USS WILSON
      - CTF 72
        - CTG 72.3 P-3
  - CINCPACAF
    - 13TH AIR FORCE
      - 56 SOW OV-10
        - 21 SOS CH-53
      - 432 TFW F-4/RF-4
      - 388 TFW A-7, F-111 F-4, AC-130
      - 374 TFW C-130
      - 7 ACCS EC-130
  - MAC
    - 40 ARRS HH-53
    - 56 ARRS HC-130
  - SAC
    - 307 SW KC-135

*Adapted from Commander in Chief Pacific Command Overview, *The SS Mayaguez Incident. Command History Branch, Office of the Joint Secretary, Appendix VI. San Francisco, CA. 1976.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

LIST OF REFERENCES

Argyris, Chris. *Personality and Organization.* New York: Harper and Row, 1957.

Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It.* New York: Basic Books, 1989.

United States Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 6: *Command and Control.* Department of the Navy: PCN 142 000001 00, October 4, 1996.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allison, Graham & Philip Zelikow. Essence of Decision Making: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis. 2nd Ed. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, Inc., 1999.

Argyris, Chris. Integrating the Individual and the Organization. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964.

Bolman, Larry G. and Terrence E. Deal. Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership. 3rd Ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Commander in Chief Pacific Command. The SS *Mayaguez* Incident. Command History Branch, Office of the Joint Secretary, Appendix VI, Overview. San Francisco, CA. 1976.

Comptroller General of the United States. Seizure of the *Mayaguez*: Parts II-I. 94th Congress, 2nd Session. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1976.

Fairhurst, Gail T., and Robert A. Sarr. The Art of Framing: Managing the Language of Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Galbraith, Jay R., Diane Downey and Amy Kates. Designing Dynamic Organizations: A Hands on Guide for Leaders at All Levels. New York: American Management Association, 2002.

Guilmartin, John F., Jr. A Very Short War: The *Mayaguez* and the Battle of Koh Tang. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995.

Heffron, Florence A. Organization Theory and Public Organizations: The Political Connection. NJ:Apprentice Hall, 1989.

Jones, Michael O. Studying Organizational Symbolism: What, How, Why? Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996.

Kotter, John P. The General Managers. New York: Free Press, 1982.

Kotter, John P. Power and Influence: Beyond Formal Authority.   New York: Free Press, 1985.

Martinez, J. Carlos, and Jon. C. Jarillo. "The evolution of research on coordination mechanisms in multinational research." Journal of International Business Studies, 1989: 489-514.

Mintzberg, Henry. "Organization Design: Fashion or Fit?" Harvard Business Review, January-February (1981): 1-16.

Mintzberg, Henry. and Quinn, James B. The Strategy Process: Cases, Concepts, Cases. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1991.

National Defense University. Strategic Leadership and Decision Making. http://www.au.af.mil/au/aw. Accessed April 1, 2006.

National Security Council Memorandum for the Record. Wednesday, May 14, 1975, 6:40pm-8:00pm. Gerald Ford Library.

National Security Council Minutes. Tuesday, May 13, 1975, 10:40pm-12:25am. Gerald Ford Library.

National Security Council Minutes. Wednesday, May 14,1975, 3:52pm-5:42pm. Gerald Ford Library.

National Security Council Minutes. Thursday, May 15, 1975, 4:02pm-4:20pm. Gerald Ford Library.

Pfeffer, Jeffrey. Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1992.

Principia Cybernetica Web. http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/LAW_VARIE.html. Accessed Aug 24, 2006.

Quinn, Kenneth. *Mayaguez* Paper. Kenneth Quinn to General Scowcroft. 25 Aug 75. "*Mayaguez* Performance Evaluation – Memoranda 6/75-10/75," Box 8. National Secruity Adviser Staff Assistant John K. Matheny Files. Gerald R. Ford Library.

Russo, J. Edward and Paul J.H. Schoemaker. Decision Traps: Ten Barriers to Brilliant Decision-Making and How to Overcome Them. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Rowen, Roy. The Four Days of the *Mayaguez*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975.

Seized at Sea: Situation Critical: The Story of the *Mayaguez* Crisis. DVD. Produced, directed, and written by Brian Kelly. Alexandria, VA: Henninger Productions, 2000.

United States Joint Forces Command. Joint Center for Operational Analysis. http://www.jfcom.mil/about/fact_jcoa.htm. Accessed August 23, 2006.

United States Department of Defense News Release. "MIA Marines Identified from the *Mayaguez* Incident."
http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/2000/b05182000_bt260-00.html. Accessed August 20, 2006.

Wilderom, Celeste P.M., Mark Peterson, and Neal Ashkanasy, eds. Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000.

Zegart, Amy B. Flawed by Design. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999.

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST

1.   Defense Technical Information Center
        Ft. Belvoir, Virginia

2.   Dudley Knox Library
        Naval Postgraduate School
        Monterey, California